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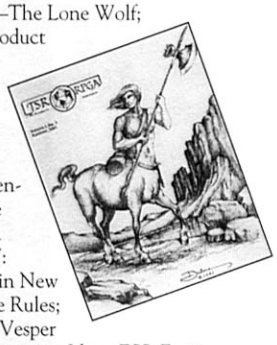

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21: Gygax on Gargoyles and **Greyhawk**; **SF:** Big Ship Campaigns; *SB*; **AD&D: Adv.**—Witchstone; *DC*.

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25: New Magic-User Spells; **AD&D: Adv.**—Needle (Part 2); **MSH: Adv.**—Rampage; *DC*.

26: Anti-Gaming Hysteria; **AD&D: Adv.**—Needle (Part 3); *DC*; **GW:** The Solar System; New Illusionist Spells.

27: New Magic-User Spells; *NRG*; **MSH: Adv.**—She-Rampage!; Alignment; *DC*; **GW:** Mars.

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29: **AD&D: Adv.**—The Camel's Nose; The Ecology of Tiamat; Silly Spells; **GW:** Gods of **GW**.

30: *NRG*; Fantasy Demographics; **AD&D: Adv.**—Ravager; New Golems; **BH:** Annie Oakley; **GW:** Preview; *DC*.

33: Ending Campaigns; **AD&D: Adv.**—The Sword & the Anti-Hero; *NRG*.

36: **AD&D: Adv.**—Pilgrim's Pool; On the Road to the **Living City**; Fantasy Cultures.

37: **LC:** Open Scalery; **CHI: Adv.**—Film Noir, *WGP*.

38: Magic-User University; **AD&D: Adv.**—Escape from Demoncoomb Mountain; Roleplaying and Education; *NRG*; **LC:** Encounter; Taxes.

39: **AD&D:** 2nd Edition Preview; **LC:** Tym's Supple Leather Shoppe; **MSH: Adv.**—The Investigators; *WGP*.

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43: **BH: Adv.**—Dr. Brown's Miracle Juice; Magic Weapons; **LC:** Angel; *NRG*.

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46: **TS/SI: Adv.**—Junk Bonds; **LC:** Skully's Bar and Bait, Embrol Sludge's Eatery and Shell Shoppe; Bureaucrats; Using Illusions.

47: *NRG*; **AD&D: Adv.**—The Bell of Zeltar; Designing Tournament PCs; **GW:** The Mutant's Armory; Attending a Con; New Magic Items; **LC:** Burnhart's Outfitting.

48: **AD&D: Adv.**—Cataclysm (Part 1); **GW:** The Mutant's Armory; **SJ:** Preview; **LC:** The Glow Shop.

49: *WGP*; **AD&D:** 2nd Edition Overview, **Adv.**—Cataclysm (Part 2); **GW:** The Mutant's Armory; *NRG*; **LC:** For-Rest Inn;

50: Cool Color Cover; **GW:** Minerals; *WGP*; **LC:** The Toysmiths, Brothers Galgolar, **Adv.**—Counterfeit Dreams; *NRG*.

51: **BH:** New Edition Preview; *WGP*; **AD&D: Adv.**—The Caves of Confection; **LC:** The Downunda Patisserie; Asian Languages; *NRG*; *TLG*; **TS/SI:** Espionage School.

53: **AD&D: Adv.**—Torrand's Tribulations; **GW:** The Dreadbot; *NRG*; *TLG*; Acronyms; **LC:** The Ice House.

54: *NRG*; Painting Miniatures; **AM:** Overview; *EEE*; **CoC: Adv.**—Odder than Odd; *TLG*; **LC:** Lyle's Fine Cloaks.

56: **AD&D: Adv.**—Winter Holiday; *NRG*; **LC:** Black Dugal's Music Shop; **BH:** Settlement Generation; *EEE*.

57: **LC:** Burton's Bouncing Bears; **GW:** Mutations; *EEE*; *WGP*; **AD&D: Adv.**—Rakshasa; *TLG*; **MM:** Overview and Errata.

58: *NRG*; New Magic Items; Australian Gaming; **AD&D: Adv.**—The Legacy (**GH**); *TLG*; *WGP*; *EEE*; **LC:** Logic Puzzle; **ItD**.

59: **BH:** Native American Wars; **LC:** Two Brother's Butchery; *NRG*; *TLG*; **DS:** Overview, New Monsters; **AD&D: Adv.**—A Friend in Need; *WGP*; *ItD*.

60: New Priest Spells; **MSH: Adv.**—The Doom Wars (Part 1); *TLG*; *EEE*; **LC:** The Dancing Bear Inn; *ItD*; *NRG*.

61: *NRG*; **MSH: Adv.**—The Doom Wars (Part 2); **LC:** Port of Ravens Bluff; *TLG*; *ItD*.

63: *EEE*; **AD&D: Adv.**—Crisis in the Cragmoors; *TLG*; *WGP*; Naming Military Units; *ItD*; **LC:** Chemcheaux; New Wizard Spells.

64: **GW:** New Edition Overview; **AD&D: Adv.**—Short People; *EEE*; *TLG*; *ItD*; **LC:** Wu Ling's Magic Lantern Show.

65: **LC:** Holly's Mill. Potions. *TLG*; *ItD*; *WGP*.

66: **LC:** Oljagg's Rag and Bottle Shop, **Adv.**—Caravan; **PAR:** Martial Arts Rules; *WGP*; *EEE*; *ItD*; *TLG*.

67: **LC:** Sigil of the Silent Night; **BH:** Horse Generator; New Monsters; *EEE*; *ItD*; **GW:** Artifacts; *TLG*.

68: Festivals and City Adventures; Hearth Fiend; **SW:** The Fatal Visionaries; **AD&D: Adv.**—Hero; *TLG*; *EEE*; *WGP*; *ItD*.

69: **AD&D: Adv.**—Sea of Fire (Part 1) (**OA**); **LC:** Ye Olde Bluff Jeweler; *NRG*; *ItD*; **GW:** Treasure; **Club Profile:** The Valiant Thirteenth; *TLG*.

70: *EEE*; **AD&D: Adv.**—Sea of Fire (Part 2) (**OA**); **LC:** Signs Painted, The Red Ravens; **GW: Adv.**—Pod Mutation Increases; *WGP*; *TLG*, *ItD*.

71: **PAR: Adv.**—Fluffynoia; Fluffy Trivia; *TLG*; *ItD*.

72: *WGP*; **LC:** Swimming Lessons; Dopplegangers; **AD&D: Adv.**—Experience Preferred (Part 1); *TLG*; *ItD*; Magical Masks; *EEE*.

74: **LC:** The Ill Eagle Inn; **RL:** Forbidden Lore Preview; *EEE*; **AD&D: Adv.**—Experience Preferred (Part 2); **SJ: Space: 1889** Conversion; *ItD*; *TLG*.

75: **LC:** Eye of Newt and Food for Familiars; *EEE*; **AD&D: Adv.**—You've Lost Your Marbles!; *WGP*; Thri-kreen; *TLG*; *ItD*; Blade Golem.

76: Magical Swords; **AD&D: Adv.**—The Valley of Death; *ItD*; New Monsters; *TLG*; **LC:** Eormennoth.

77: EEE; **LC:** Elonia's Beauty Shoppe, **Adv.**—Downunder the Living City; **DL:** Weather of Krynn; *TLG*; *ItD*.

78: **DL:** Languages of Krynn; **AD&D: Adv.**—A Fluffy Wonderland; **LC:** Art's Haven; *TLG*; *EEE*; *ItD*; Being a Hero.

79: *EEE*; **GW: Adv.**—Evansburg; New Monsters; **LC:** The Painted Boat Restaurant; *TLG*; Winning Tournaments; Smithing Proficiencies; *ItD*.

81: *EEE*; **AD&D: Adv.**—In His Majesty's Spacial Service (**SJ**); Mechs and Manga; *TLG*; **LC:** Renegade's Run.

82: **LC:** The Sapient Sorcerer; New Magic Items; *EEE*; *TLG*; *ItD*.

83: R.A. Salvatore Interview; **LC:** The Lord Thief-Taker; **SW: Adv.**—Milk Run; **TLG**; *NRG*; Playing by Mail; *ItD*; *EEE*.

84: *NRG*; **LC:** The Bandaged Wound, Traagor's Tours and Souvenir Shop; New Magic Items; *EEE*; *TLG*; *ItD*; Network Mascots.

85: *EEE*; **AD&D: Adv.**—Silverwood; *TLG*; *ItD*; *WGP*.

86: **LC:** Friar Cookpot; **SW:** The New Republic Campaign; Mechanical Golem (**RL**); *EEE*; *TLG*; Science Gadgets; *ItD*.

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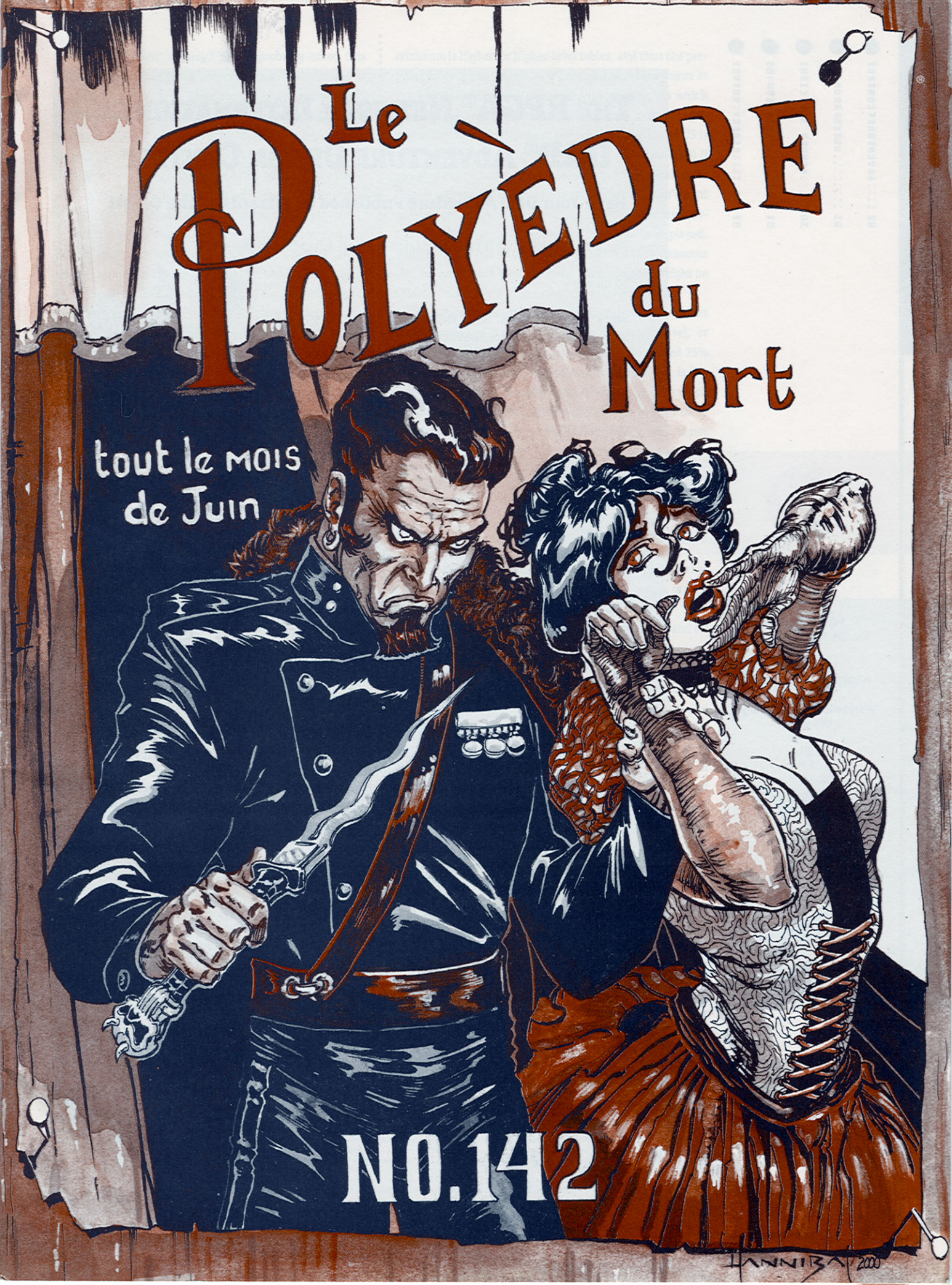
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NO.142
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02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

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02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

notes from HQ

WHAT'S THE POINT, ANYWAY?

What's the point, anyway? You've probably asked this question about the RPGA points system. We've asked it occasionally. Why do we issue points? What are they good for? Well, points exist for you. We give points for playing and judging RPGA adventures so that you can see how well you are playing, and can get a chance to play in adventures alongside people with the same RPGA roleplaying experience as yourself. Plus, many members appreciate the "milestone" aspect of achieving Grand Master or Paragon level.

The problem is, the points system is not a good measure of how good a roleplayer you are. The accumulation of points rewards longevity, not quality, and the amount of points does not relate in a real way to how well you played. The formula for assigning points is very complex and secret, and takes into account your placement and the team score, as well as your own score from the table. The closeness of the voting also is a factor. Sometimes, the amounts can seem rather arbitrary. A really good game is worth a maximum of 850 points, but could be worth 650, or 700, depending on those other factors. If you play the same table at Grand Masters level, it is worth a maximum of 3,400 points. As we work to merge the UK members' points with the rest of the Network's points, we've taken the opportunity to examine these issues, and the UK system for awarding points. We concluded that if we are going to use points to tell you how well you are doing, you should be able to look at your points for a given table and understand what they mean. Thus, we have decided to change the system.

What? Change the points? Will my level change? Didn't you just change them?

Hold on, let me explain. In the UK system, which we intend to adopt world-wide, the formula for points is based on your score at the table, and scales to a range of some minimum to 1,000 points, for each table. Feature to Paragon, the maximum is 1,000. This is good because you can look at your scores and see how you are doing, as all scores mean the same thing. A score of 800 on a table is about 80% of ideal, and you can scan your scores and see something meaningful. Since the points are for you, they might as well be useful to you, right?

Paragon points are only worth 1,000? Like Feature events? Then why play them? Well, in the UK formula, the minimum is higher for higher-level tables, and thus the per-point value is smaller. So, you generally get more points at the higher-level tables, unless you are winning (in which case you get about the same). The reason that Paragon points are normally five times the normal value in the US is that it is harder to get to the higher levels, so (like D&D) if you play in your tier, you get more points. To compensate for this, we plan to change the threshold tables. We don't want anyone losing levels because of this change, so we are looking at how many games people of given levels have played, and how many points they have, and where the minimums are, so that we don't affect levels. Some members might be affected, but in 99% of the cases they should not be.

This is where we would like your input. How many games should someone have played to reach Masters level, or Grand Masters, or Paragon? Should they have scored 75% of the maximum points at each one, or 50%? What is the least number of games that someone should play to reach these levels? What about benefit games? They used to be worth double points, but in this new scheme we would not be multiplying points anymore. It has been suggested that playing or judging benefit games would be worth service points. What do you think?

Send us mail, or email to robertw@wizards.com, and let us know what you think about these weighty issues. Respond by July 31st, please.

The change in points should take place in September. At that time we'll also bring back the Top Player and Judge lists.

Lastly, because so many of you are playing so many of our games, a handful of members stand on the threshold of 10th level. So, given the titles we have, what should we call 10th level? Master Adventurer (or Master Judge) just sounds too much like the 3rd level title. We're interested in your input!

Until next time, go carefully.

Robert

in this issue:

02 ADVENTURE DESIGN CONTEST
03 NOTES FROM HQ
04 REMEMBERING DAN CUNNINGHAM
06 TABLE TALK: LEGENDARY WEAPONS
08 FEAR THEATRE: GRAND GUIGNOL
15 PUTTING LIFE BACK INTO THE UNDEAD
18 WITHOUT A TRACE
20 MEN OF THE BASILISK
28 EVIL IS AS EVIL DOES
30 MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 INTERNET 101: CONSPIRACIES
32 READER SURVEY

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

Remembering Dan Cunningham

BY JEAN RABE

He was a giant of a man with an even bigger heart. He had a booming laugh that would stretch across a gaming room and dare others to come over to share in the fun. A friend and a gentleman first, and an excellent DM second, you would have been hard-pressed to find a better gaming table to be seated at than one where Dan Cunningham was.

Dan left us March 21st, dying of a brain aneurysm just after he completed an interview for a computer job he was certain to get. His death came only a few days after he'd played in Slot Zeroes for this year's Weekend in Ravens Bluff, where he was scheduled to judge. What was intended as a simple memorial service the following Sunday night at a small Milwaukee funeral home turned into a standing-room-only affair where Dan's friends—some of whom drove several hours to get there—took turns at the podium, recalling fond memories, most of them centering around conventions and games.

Though he had only a few years to spend here, he made a lasting impression on gamers, from the time he attended his first convention and played in his first Network events 15 years ago, to this past Winter Fantasy,™ when he wowed other first-time players with his judging style. He was especially loved by gamers in the Midwest, who would do their best to snare a playing spot at a table he was running. And he was respected by fellow judges who, if they wanted to compete against him, had to do their absolute best on weekends when he was present. Perfect 180 scores were frequent for him.

He was a founding member and past president of the Fellowship of the Black Spot, an RPGA® Network club, and he organized quite a few Milwaukee gaming events—some held in traditional halls, others in the basements of bowling alleys or in apartment complex clubhouses, overlooking an "off-limits" swimming pool.

Most recently, he was a member of the Wisconsin LIVING GREYHAWK™ Regional Triad, and was working to write his first tournament. Fellow triad members are planning to finish that event and run it at an upcoming convention.

Classic players knew Dan for scheduling tournaments with pre-generated PCs at cons that were otherwise filled with only "Living" events, and he would choose those events based on his favorite authors. Among them was Tom Prusa, who wrote some of Dan's favorite swashbuckler games. Dan admitted he was a swashbuckler at heart.

Living City players knew Dan for his dynamic characters, who were very slow to pick from the treasure pool. His favorite character was Alrik the Magnus, a 10th level swashbuckler (naturally) who was as clever with words as he was skilled with a blade. "King of the Britons," Alrik called himself, and heir to the backwards isle nation of Gull Easel, as he married a crafty local while adventuring there. Alrik was even a businessman, owning property in the city and purchasing a share of a pet shop (in which he reportedly installed a well-stocked bar).

Convention organizers knew Dan as someone who would run every slot if they needed a DM. And if they instead needed someone to man the registration desk, that was fine, too. Dan never had to be asked to help out. He was one of those rare folks whose hand always went up first to volunteer. He was a fixture at the major Network gatherings, attending the GEN CON® Game Fair, Origins, WINTER FANTASY,™ and more.

Dan never had a bad word to say about his fellow players and judges, finding something good in everyone. It was that quality that made him see opportunities where others saw problems. And perhaps that is one of the reasons why he will be missed so much.

Last year at Milwaukee Summer Revel he defeated all challengers and claimed top honors in the DM contest. His scores were the highest—several of them "perfect," of course. Chants of "Dan the Man" sprung up as he accepted the trophy. This year, those judging trophies will be given out in his honor.

Other area conventions are planning benefit events to recognize his contributions to gaming and to their lives. If you knew Dan, when you sit down at your next convention or gaming session, take a moment to reflect on him. And reflect, too, on the words of Joseph Roux, who said, "We call that person who has lost his father, an orphan; and a widower that man who has lost his wife. But that man who has known the immense unhappiness of losing a friend, by what name do we call him? Here every language is silent and holds its peace in impotence."

Through the years the RPGA Network has lost many of its keystone members. Perhaps somewhere beyond this Earth they are all sitting around a gaming table. And perhaps Dan Cunningham is at the head of the table—they could have found no better judge. ■

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

ILLUS. SAM WOOD

ALRIK THE MAGNUS

DANIEL CUNNINGHAM (1972-2000)

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

LEGENDARY WEAPONS

The first creative event of this year's Clubs Decathlon asked our members to send us their definition of the "Best Legendary Weapon." The contest pitted club-against-club to design a lost weapon, artifact, or relic of tremendous power, one that has survived long past its creators, and now exists mainly in stories handed down to eager young adventurers.

More than 20 Network Clubs tried their hands, and we present the best two here in *Polyhedron*, ready for introduction into your campaigns. The top finishers were newcomers the Naughty Weasels, from Australia. Coming in second were frequent Decathlon high scorers, the PM Players. We hope you enjoy their creations as much as we did.

MAKAH WHALING SPEAR

BY MARK SOMERS (THE NAUGHTY WEASELS, FIRST PLACE)

LEGEND OF THE WHALERS' SPEAR

Long ago, two brothers of the Sun and Moon came to the Earth. They were called Ho-ho-e-ap-bess, which means, "Two-Men-Who-Changed-Things." They came to make the Earth ready for a new type of creature: men. The Two-Men-Who-Changed-Things turned creatures into the animals we know today. They said to one of these creatures: "Men will come and live by the water. They will need food to hunt." They turned the creature into Whale and threw him into the sea.

Another creature lived in the sea. He was very fierce, and did not like Whale being in his waters. He attacked Whale and nearly killed him with a great horn that grew from his head. But Whale was able to survive his wounds and swim away. Seal saw this and swam to the shore and called to the Two-Men-Who-Changed-Things. "Come quick," he called. "The angry horned creature is attacking Whale."

The Two-Men-Who-Changed-Things chased the horned creature and caught him. They took away his horn and turned him into Orca. "Now you will have to hunt Whale without your horn, and you will have to share your waters with men." They threw Orca into the waters, and as he fell, he saw Seal nearby. "Now I will hunt you!" he cried, and to this day Orca prefers to eat Seal to anything in the sea.

The Two-Men-Who-Changed-Things took the horn from the creature and turned it into a spear. "When men come," they said, "we will give them this spear, so that they may hunt Whale. It will show them how to find him and will pierce his thick skin. If Orca attacks them they will fight him off with it, and he will know that it was once his horn, and will be afraid."

Thus when the men went out in their canoes to hunt for food, they had a spear that could lead them to their prey and kill it.

HISTORY

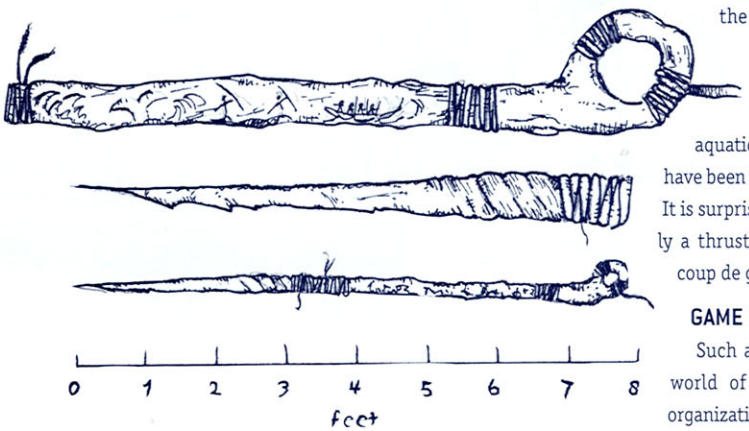
Makah legend says that before men walked the Earth there were divine beings who prepared the world for their coming. Of the things they created, one great gift was a magical whaling spear. It was said that whoever used the spear would always find their prey, and that they would never return home without a kill. The spear was passed down over generations until its origins became lost and the only tale of its creation was that of the myth memorized by tribal mystics. During the last Age, its enchantments lay dormant, yet it remained a potent symbol to the native whalers who used it on their hunts.

When Europeans came to the Pacific Northwest, they had little concept of the cultural value of the spear, but they could recognize its worth as a well-crafted and valuable weapon. Upon finding it amongst the possessions found in a village decimated by smallpox, a shore party took it back to their ship and placed it with items eventually bound for England. It came into the possession of the British Museum in London, where it lies amongst items that form an American Indian display.

Only in the last few years, since the Awakening returned magic to the Sixth World, has the spear's great power been recognized. As yet, it has not come to the attention of the Salish-Shidhe Council, though eventually it will. Should that happen, it would be an item that is greatly in demand.

DESCRIPTION

Unlike traditional Makah harpoons, which were thick-hafted and wooden, the spear is slender, made entirely of bone and horn. It is approximately eight feet in length, the last three feet of which appear to be crafted from a horn like that of a narwhal. The bone shaft is covered in traditional carvings representing aquatic creatures and human hunters. These have been worn down from centuries of handling. It is surprisingly light and strong, and is obviously a thrusting weapon designed to perform the coup de gras to a harpooned whale.



ILLUS. COREY MACOUREK

GAME HOOKS

Such a powerful magical item is rare in the world of Shadowrun. Many individuals and organizations would dearly wish to possess this

ILLUS. COREY MACOUREK

spear, especially the Makah tribe. Some would go to extremes to gain possession of the spear, and the British Museum is usually loath to give up such valuable objects. When negotiations break down, clandestine acquisition methods are often called for. That usually means the involvement of shadowrunners....

STATISTICS

Rating 6 Weapon Focus

Rating 5 Reusable Anchoring Focus [Detect Whale Extended — determine distance and direction to all whales within a half mile radius]

Rating 4 Reusable Anchoring Focus [Increase Strength +4]

Rating 4 Reusable Anchoring Focus [Enhanced Balance 4 — add 4 dice to Athletics tests for all balance tests]

Bonding Cost: 90 karma

Base Value: 1,230,000 nuyen

Actual value: Priceless

TOOLS OF THE COMMON MAN

BY TODD LAMBERTSON (PM PLAYERS, SECOND PLACE)

In a time long ago, when Faerûn was young and Myth Drannor thrived, a small battle was fought on the island of Gwynneth, in the Moonshaes.

This battle didn't have gallant knights or charging horses. It didn't have clashing swords or brightly colored flags, but it did have heroes. Heroes as honorable as any champion, and as brave as any seasoned veteran....

The Northmen had once again raided, this time delving deep into the island in an attempt to pierce the heart of Myrloch Vale, the sacred place of the goddess Chauntea. The rumors of vast treasure in the Vale had proven far too tempting to pass up. The plan was simple—the main force of Gwynneth would be tied-up with the army of the Northmen, while a small force of crack troops made their way toward the Vale. It almost worked—if it hadn't been for the simple Ffolk of Cuardin.

Cuardin, a small farming community, rested against the forest that surrounded the Vale. As the raiders advanced, a simple goat herder by the name of Shod took up the reins of command. His speech that day called upon the debts these simple farmers owed Chauntea for years of plentiful harvests. The men listened closely, the results bringing tears and inspiring hearts. Knowing that time was short, they grabbed their tools, the only weapons that they owned, and awaited their expected deaths.

From far above, Chauntea watched as her devoted followers stood their ground against the impending onslaught. Their massacre seemed assured. At that moment, she decided the sheep would not fall to the wolf, at least not that day. She sent forth three birds: the hawk, the owl, and the eagle. Each of them carried an important weapon—a small piece of grain. As the two forces prepared to meet, the gifts were delivered.

First came the hawk. It dove with a sudden quickness, dropping the piece of rye against the shovel carried by the quiet man named Gabe, a man of few words who had the strength of an ox. The spade gleamed with an eerie shine.

Next came the owl, who hovered and swooped, letting its small piece of alfalfa float harmlessly down, touching the wooden handle of Boric's pitchfork. Boric worked in the town stable. He was old, and had seen the worst of times. The three tines of the fork also took on a glow.

Finally came the eagle. It circled several times, then dropped suddenly, landing on Shod's shepherd's staff. Startled, Shod stayed frozen as the eagle let the small piece of wheat fall onto the staff before flying away. The hooked cane slowly took on a radiance that lit up the impending battlefield.

When the two sides met, it wasn't the slaughter most had feared. The farmers took casualties, but when it finished, it was the simple Ffolk who stood triumphant. Thanks to the courage of Shod, the strength of Gabe, and the wisdom of Boric, the Vale had been saved.

The tools of the common man can be used only in the defense of home and family, or for a just cause (as determined by the DM). Only a person of a true Neutral or Good alignment may handle them. All three have a small imprint of a piece of grain on the handle.

Shod's shepherd staff is a six-foot staff that curves into a hook. When its power is tapped, it acts as a *+3 quarterstaff*. It inspires the wielder with a sense of bravery that enables him or her to fight as a 7th-level Fighter (with full hit points and abilities).

Gabe's shovel is a long-handled spade. When its power is invoked, it acts as a *+3 halberd*. It gives the wielder the ability to fight as a 5th-level Fighter with full hit points and abilities. It also grants the wielder 18/00 strength for the duration of the battle.

Boric's pitchfork resembles a normal farmer's tool. When its power is invoked, it becomes a *+3 trident*. It allows the bearer to fight as a 4th-level Fighter with full hit points and abilities. It also casts a *fear* spell affecting all those who stand against the wielder for the duration of a battle.

If all three *tools of the common man* are used by the same side during a conflict, they will raise the morale of the defenders, giving them an additional +1 to all die rolls (attacks, damage, saving throws, etc.). ■

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

fear theatre: le grand guignol

BY MATTHEW SERNETT

From cobblestone streets and gaslight shadows, they crept out of the night to the Grand Guignol. The people filed in a few at a time and huddled together on pew-like seats beneath the wooden grins of wicked cherubs. Hesitantly impatient, members of the audience would wait, listening to their own nervous chuckles and lurid accounts of past performances. Soon there would be laughter; there would be drama and romance. Then the audience would get what they came for.

On the stage, almost within arm's length of the front-row seats, the patrons of the Grand Guignol would witness rape, torture, mutilation, and murder after bloody murder. Knives cut throats, fire fed on human flesh, and gouged eyes bounced and rolled across the stage. It was terrifying, repulsive, and fascinating. It was what brought them to the Grand Guignol: a curious mixture of humor and horror, laughter and blood.

The Grand Guignol was a theater in Paris that produced horror plays during the late 1890's. Through use of fake blood, parts from slaughtered animals, and ingenious special effects, the Grand Guignol thrilled audiences with gory shows that shattered social taboos and delved into the dark side of man's mind. It became one of the premiere tourist attractions of France's capital, and in the world of Gothic Earth, it became something more monstrous than the mind of man could imagine.

> "Art, like Nature, has her monsters, things of bestial shape with hideous voices."
> —Oscar Wilde

Le Theatre du Grand Guignol was founded in Paris in the spring of 1897, on the heels of Emile Zola's naturalist movement, which espoused that theater should present real life. Oscar Metenier, a playwright and director, chose to house the Grand Guignol at 20 rue Chaptal in a building which once was a Jansenist refuge and convent. The small stage and cramped seating lent the place the anxious atmosphere of a confessional booth, which appealed to Metenier's sense of the gothic. He named it after Guignol, the popular Punch and Judy puppet character whose name had come to be a generic term for any show involving puppets. Thus the "Grand Guignol" was a large puppet show wherein the audience were adults and the puppets real actors.

With much fanfare, Metenier opened the Theater of the Grand Guignol on April 13th, 1897. Dressed in black and flanked by bodyguards, Metenier triumphantly walked down the orchestra aisle, to adulation and the shouted greetings of friends. The first night was a surprising success in jaded Paris, and soon a regular bill was established. The shows ran in a "hot and cold shower" formula of comedy and drama. A normal night consisted of a slapstick curtain raiser, a light drama, a comedy, the horror play, and then a farce. The horror plays were patterned after newspaper articles called *faits divers*, which described bizarre and violent events.

The Grand Guignol sustained its success for four seasons, but in 1898 Metenier sold his interest and vanished into history. He was replaced by the mysterious Max Maurey, a man unknown in theater circles. Unlike Metenier, Maurey had no interest in theatrical experimentation or the ideas of theater philosophers like Emile Zola. Instead, it seemed, his motivation was financial success. Metenier focused on theater as a slice of life but Maurey's interest pointed toward something different: what one critic called "slice of death" drama.

Nothing was too grotesque or taboo for Maurey's stage. Under his direction, the Grand Guignol became a pageant of horror, slaking the French public's lust for blood and filling the void left by the ban on public executions. Yet Maurey did not abandon all of Metenier's conventions. He retained the "hot and cold shower" format, calling it "laughter and tears," and stuck to a strict regimen of alternating comedy and horror. Maurey's terrifying plays were longer than Metenier's simple sketches, and most were purely fictional. On Maurey's stage, horror was immediate and physically shocking, even sickening.

Max Maurey was a demanding impresario and quickly gained a reputation as a perfectionist. He had a bad habit of rewriting scripts, toying with stage effects, and making last minute changes that caused dangerous friction with his actors, writers, and musicians, but made for stunning performances. It wasn't uncommon for members of the audience to faint during the last suspenseful moments of his plays, and the alley outside the theater was often frequented by vomiting or hyperventilating patrons.

The plots of the Grand Guignol horror plays ran the gamut of the dark and dreaded themes of the human psy-

che. Vengeance, insanity, suicide, helplessness, and the victimization of the innocent were common elements. Here are few sample plots:

THE FINAL TORTURE

Several Frenchmen have been trapped in the consulate of a foreign country for a month while surrounded by a hostile force. Some of them have attempted unsuccessful escapes. A brave marine returns to the consulate with his hands cut off. Showing his bloody stumps, he describes the atrocities that other attempted escapees have suffered, then dies. The head of the consul asks his subordinate to kill his daughter so that she will not have to endure any torture when the consulate is overrun. The man is in love with the girl and so refuses, forcing the head of the consul to shoot his own daughter. At that moment a bugle sounds: The French army has arrived, and the consulate is saved. The head of the consul goes mad.

THE EYES OF THE GHOST

The chief doctor of a hospital for the mentally ill, a gentle and humane person, is concerned for the welfare of his patients. One was murdered the previous night at midnight. The doctor increases the number of guards and reprimands one for his brutality. At midnight another patient is murdered. The patients discover the murderer is the sleepwalking chief doctor. As a storm rages outside the patients drag the doctor down and gouge out his eyes.

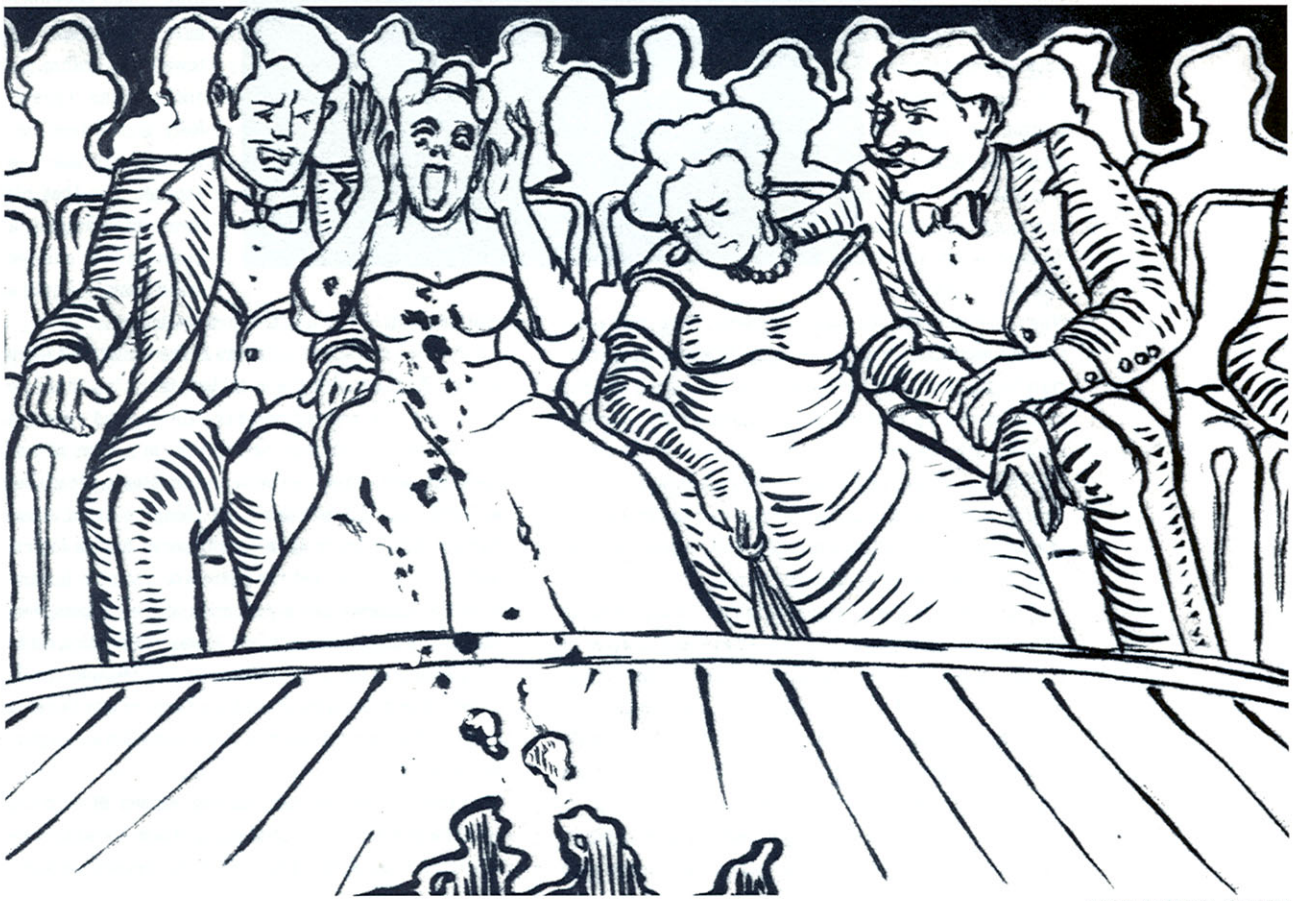
THE MERCHANT OF CORPSES

A woman anxiously awaits her daughter, who is late coming home from school. There is a carnival in town, and the mother has heard about a child-murderer who always reappears at carnival time. When her child fails to return, she denounces a carnival worker as the murderer of her daughter. There is no body, so the police do nothing. A friend of the woman kidnaps the accused man and plunges him in a vat of acid used to prepare skeletons for a medical department. The mother collapses when she sees the chemically deteriorating body. The dead man was innocent; her daughter has returned safely home.

THE LABORATORY OF HALLUCINATIONS

The wife of a sinister doctor decides to run off with their neighbor. She says that she is going to explore some Roman ruins with friends and heads to her rendezvous. While the doctor and an assistant engage in torturous experiments on a bound and screaming patient, his neighbor is brought in. The man's skull was fractured in a car accident. The doctor finds his wife's love letter in his neighbor's pocket. Mad with jealousy, he decides to poke and cut the man's brain until he becomes insane. His wife returns and the doctor describes his plans, exhibiting his progress and their neighbor's current state of derangement. In a fit of fury the mad neighbor bursts from his restraints and subjects the doctor to the same torture. The doctor's head is cut open while his wife watches the struggles of her two dying lovers in horror.

02 .....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY



ILLUS. MICHAEL GIBSON

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

THE MAKER OF MONSTERS

A mad scientist has created a menagerie of freak animals, to which he has given human parts and traits. He shows them in a circus exhibit. His greatest project is a gorilla that he is trying to transform into a man. One night he invites a circus woman into his tent and tries to seduce her. The gorilla becomes jealous and interrupts the scientist's intentions by grunting and growling dangerously. To punish the animal and the resistant woman, he grabs a scalpel and announces he is going to disfigure her face. Bloodied and screaming, the circus woman manages to maneuver the scientist near the gorilla's cage. The man-animal reaches out and violently strangles his tormentor.

FORBIDDEN LORE

When Max Maurey entered the Grand Guignol theater during one of the performances of its second season, he saw something that caused him to collapse in a dead faint. This wasn't considered unusual, but when he started to convulse and foam at the mouth, a doctor was summoned. The doctor declared that he had a weak heart, and that the show must have been too much for him. He was taken to a hospital where he recovered but remained delirious for several days. During this delirium, he continued to mutter something about fear. With no sign that his condition was changing, the doctors decided to send him to a mental institution. When they entered his room, however, they discovered that the mysterious man had escaped. There was some concern for a few days, but when police inquiries and a public notice turned up nothing, it was assumed the man had awoken from his delirium and was hiding from the public eye because he was embarrassed. Max Maurey did indeed hide from the public eye, but is was not embarrassment that caused him to haunt university and medical libraries in disguise and under an assumed name.

> "The pious pretense that evil does not exist only makes it vague, enormous and menacing."
>
> —Aleister Crowley

Maurey was born with a unique talent. He can, with no effort at all, see emotions. He perceives them as auras of various colors that cling to people's bodies. This caused him a great deal of trouble early in his life, but he soon learned not to speak of his special sight. His mother was a superstitious woman and her aura would turn a luminous yellow-green, the color of fear, whenever he spoke of what his mother called "witch vision." He became a quiet, watchful child, and gradually gained a pensive and thoughtful look beyond his years. It was hard for him to interpret what he saw and why some people's auras showed one emotion but they behaved differently. He became interested in acting, as this activity accentuated the difference between how he and others perceived emotions, but Maurey was never one for the stage. Instead, he worked on the sidelines, helping theaters in various ways but always experimenting and observing, always exploring the relationship between action and emotion. He came to view reliance on emotions as a weakness, a disease left over from man's animal past. It was apparent to him that man should be guided purely by reason. Only by ridding itself of emotion could mankind attain true greatness.

Maurey always had kept this goal in mind, but with no idea how to attain it he concentrated on using his second sight and knowledge of people's dissembling ways to quietly gain wealth and influence. On one of his financial ventures in Paris, he decided to indulge his fascination with the theater by seeing a show at the Grand Guignol. He arrived late and entered during the horror play. As he expected, a ghostly green radiance surrounded most of the members of the audience, but Maurey was surprised to see tendrils of the emotional aura wafting up toward the ceiling. He entered the theater fully and looked up. What he saw so shocked him that his own aura flashed a bright green and he was blinded. He gave a terrified shout then fell to the floor, twitching.

During his semi-conscious stay at the hospital, Maurey became obsessed with the wrinkled, tentacled thing he saw lurking near the ceiling of the theater and obsessed with his reaction to it. For the first time in his life, he was totally helpless, possessed with an unreasoning fear that paralyzed him. It was exactly the thing he hated about emotion; its ability to take control away from a logical mind. The thing he saw, the brain-like phantom lurking above the audience like a puppeteer above puppets, was somehow an embodiment of fear. It was the emotion made real. As soon as the thought entered his delirious mind, Maurey knew it was true. It explained why he was the only one who could see the creature and it gave him a new purpose in life.

For the next two months, Maurey learned all he could about the psychology and physiology of fear. He was determined to find a way to rid himself of the dreaded emotion.

He made little progress until he visited the Grand Guignol a second time. He dared not go inside, but as he watched the patrons enter and exit, he noticed a subtle difference in their auras. It became apparent that the horror show had a cathartic effect. Most of the people who had seen the show emerged with less fear than they had entered with. To Maurey's mind, this made perfect sense. If fear were a disease, then the Grand Guignol offered a kind of vaccine to its audience members. The fear the show caused inured them somewhat to the stress and fears they experienced in daily life.

Maurey used his influence to pressure Oscar Metenier into selling his theater. After he made the purchase, Maurey steeled himself and walked into the Grand Guignol. He was surprised to see that the embodiment of fear had not dissipated even though no play was being shown. In fact it had grown to twice its size since his last visit. For a long time, Maurey just stood and stared, but by and by his curiosity overtook his shock and he began to study it. The amorphous brain-like thing covered a third of the ceiling, and two great tentacles stretched out to arch over the seats like a hideous umbrella. Suspended pendulously from the main body was a smaller version of the embodied fear. This was a new addition.

This smaller version hung in a cocoon-like sheath of slime, but other than the difference in girth it seemed an exact replica of the first creature. Awed and intrigued by this new turn of events, Maurey got a ladder and investigated. He was surprised to find the thing real to the touch, and even more shocked when it fell into his hands at the slightest tug. Without delay, he took it down.

Just then, an actress entered and screamed terribly before she fainted. It was apparent that she had seen the thing he carried. Startled by this turn of events, Maurey still had it in his arms when several other actors arrived to determine what the ruckus was about. With a combination of bluster and humor, Maurey convinced them that he carried a prop for a horror play he had written, and that the actress had fainted when she saw it. He excused himself, and fled to the catacomb-like basement beneath the theater to decide what to do next. After some thought, it occurred to Maurey that the thing he had must be a more potent embodiment of fear because it was somehow more real than the larger one in the theater. Its reality is the key to Maurey's dream of ridding himself of fear. For from this creature and others to come, Maury extracts a luminous green liquid which he hopes is the "vaccine" to the dreaded emotion.

> How does one kill fear, I wonder? How do you shoot a specter through the heart, slash off its spectral head, take it by its spectral throat?"
>
> —Joseph Conrad

THE FEAR

Max Maurey is trifling with forces far more dangerous than simple emotions. The embodiment of fear that floats near the ceiling of the Grand Guignol is in fact a great feyr, a hideous beast born of the horror of the residents of the Jansenist convent that would become the Grand Guignol during the Reign of Terror, who feared that the mob would storm their home, carting them in tumbrels to the guillotine. The monster has since grown fat on the emotions the horror shows produce, but there isn't enough ambient magic for it to awaken so it remains invisible and inactive. The fear generated by the Grand Guignol, however, is potent enough to spawn common feyrs, which form as buds on the great feyr. These lesser creatures would awaken if allowed to separate on their own, but Maurey plucks the obscene fruit before this can occur. The pain of this event grants the great feyr consciousness for a short time—just long enough for it to recognize its tormentor. Then, it goes back to sleep to dream evil dreams.

Common Feyr (1-4): AC 2; MV 12; HD 4; hp 16; THAC0 17; #AT 4; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1-4/1-4; SA *fear*; SW sunlight; MR 10%; SZ S (2' tall); ML 18; Int 5; AL CE; XP 975. (See *Monstrous Manual*, p. 116)

Great Feyr (1): AC -2; MV 12, fl 18 (B); HD 16; hp 61; THAC0 5; #AT 4; Dmg 2-12/2-12/2-12/2-12; SA *emotion control, fear*; SD *invisibility*; MR 40%; SZ G (20' wide); ML 18; Int 14; AL CE; XP 13,000. (See *Monstrous Manual*, p. 116)

Anyone witnessing an attack by a great or common feyr must make a save vs. spells or be consumed by *fear* (as per the spell of the same name). Common feyrs are destroyed by sunlight. A great feyr can become *invisible* at will, and can use its *emotion control* power without becoming visible. The *emotion control* ability works the same way as the 4th-level Wizard spell *emotion*. It has a range of 100 yards and affects a 20' by 20' area.

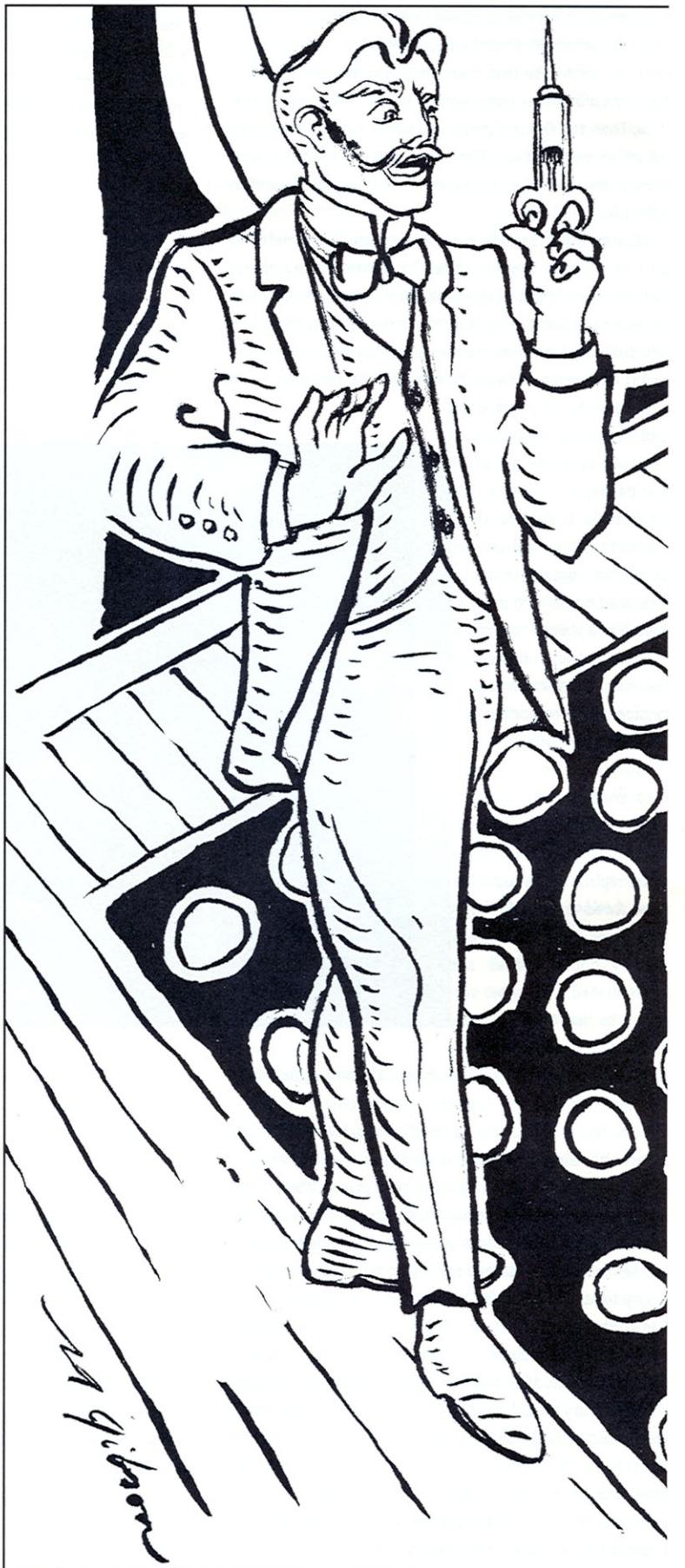
The Grand Guignol's great feyr is much larger than a normal great feyr. It should be enough of a challenge with its normal statistics, but DMs who wish to represent its larger size should give it 20 more hit points, and two tentacle attacks that cause 2d12 points of damage. On a roll to hit

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

with a tentacle that succeeds by five or more, the great feyr has snatched up the character and can automatically hit in the following rounds for normal damage or throw the character up to 60' away. A character in the grip of a tentacle can free himself by making a contested strength roll against Strength 19 or by causing the great feyr 10 points of damage. If the PCs defeat this more powerful version of the great feyr they should be awarded an extra 4,000 XP.

The great feyr need not be involved in an adventure that deals with the Grand Guignol, but it could be awakened if the player characters cast magic in the theater or inadvertently cause it damage (by firing a gun in the air, etc.). If awoken, the great feyr will appear visibly, inspiring horror in anyone nearby. Then it will seek out Max Maurey and kill him. Beyond that, the great feyr's motivations are left to the DM. It is a highly intelligent creature and would seek a way to inspire terror in as many people as possible, perhaps by fomenting riots and other large scale conflicts. It would have to escape the building first, of course, and it can accomplish this by taking four rounds and using its tentacles to smash its way through the walls of the theater or by dividing into 1d20 + 10 common feyrs that then flee the building and scatter throughout Paris, perhaps with the intention of joining together months later.

An adventure could involve just a few common feyrs if the player characters prevent Maurey from harvesting them. These feyrs would then stalk the alleys and shadowy streets of Paris until they blunder into the sunlight or are killed by the PCs.



ILLUS. MICHAEL GIBSON

MAX MAUREY

Max Maurey, male human Tr3: AC 9; MV 12; hp 12; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; SZ M (6' tall); ML 11; Str 9, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 13, Wis 14, Chr 16; AL CN; XP 65.
Special Equipment: derringer, knife, syringe (x3).
Special Abilities: Backstab (x2), Disguise (16).

Max Maurey is mad. He was driven insane by his first encounter with the great feyr. But Maurey's madness takes the form of morbid fascination with the "embodiment" and an obsession with finding a vaccine for fear. He keeps his quest secret and guards it as well as he has his "witch vision."

In a securely locked lab beneath the Grand Guignol, Maurey experiments with different chemicals and the luminous green liquid he extracts from the common feyrs. Not brave enough to try them himself, Maurey tests his "vaccines" on vagrants he finds sleeping in the alleys of Paris. So far he has had little success, as his ministrations usually cause his victims to run screaming into the night. A few have gone mad, and some have died of fright. This does not discourage Maurey, it merely fuels his desire for a perfected solution to use on himself. After all, once he has perfected the vaccine, it will be a boon to all of mankind. No dictator could rule through fear. War would be pointless because no one would fear death. Without the fear of change, technology could excel by leaps and bounds. What are a few lives compared to that?

> "When evil acts in the world, it always manages to find instruments who believe that what they do is not evil but honorable."
>
> —Max Lerner

Maurey believes that the horror shows he produces must engender a particular state of fear or the vaccine he creates from the purer embodiments will cause the illness rather than cure it. Thus he is always tinkering with productions and keeps an eye on the ceiling of the theater during shows. Maurey doesn't know the feyrs are living creatures. Their mouths and eyes are hidden by folds of flesh while they hibernate. But even if Maurey knew, It would not stop him. He is determined to rid himself and the world of fear.

Max Maurey is a slight but healthy looking man in his early forties. He sports a thick well-groomed fake mustache. Maurey uses his knowledge of acting and theater makeup to disguise himself when he vaccinates his victims, and finds it useful to be able to apply or discard facial hair at a moment's notice.

Maurey is generally quiet and unobtrusive. His knowledge of others' emotional states allows him to manipulate people and avoid confrontations. Because of this, he is a hard man to dislike, but his actors and musicians see a part of him that others can't. When directing a production, his desire to produce the perfect type of fear overrides his reserved nature, and he can become bellicose and brutally cutting. Maurey's second sight often allows him to recognize lies and feigned emotions, and he uses this to his advantage when dealing with his staff.

Max Maurey will attempt to talk his way out of any conflict with the PCs, but if that doesn't work he threatens them with his derringer. If the player characters still force a conflict and Maurey cannot flee, he will fire his gun until it is empty then attempt to inject one or two of the PCs with his vaccine, as he carries a few syringes with him most of the time. A successful hit with a syringe causes one point of damage and requires that the character make a horror check, as described below. Maurey has no wish to die, and will flee if given any opportunity. If his plots are revealed to the authorities, Maurey will flee to another country under an assumed name and try to start another horror show. He will not forget the PCs and will use what influence he can gain to thwart their plans under various guises.

No matter what chemicals Maurey adds to his vaccines, they all end up looking and behaving in the same manner. They have a luminous yellow-green color and are slightly thicker than water, behaving in a similar manner to mercury when poured onto any surface. The liquid remains potent as long as it stays out of the direct light of the sun. For, like the common feyrs from which they are made, the vaccines vanish into nothingness when struck by sunlight.

Those injected with the liquid must make a horror check. Characters who succeed against the horror check must then make a fear check. A character who succeeds against both checks may act as they wish but feel a queer chill throughout their bodies. Failed checks focus on the syringe as the object of their terror, so a rage result will cause the character to attack anyone with a syringe and a revulsion result will cause the character to be repelled by syringes and by extension doctors and hospitals, as well. Drinking the vaccine has the same effect, but contact with it merely causes a slight chill and the uncanny feeling that the liquid is wholly unnatural.

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 ....NOTES FROM HQ
30 ....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 ....INTERNET 101
32 ....READER SURVEY

GETTING THE PARTY INVOLVED

The player characters can become embroiled in an adventure that involves the Grand Guignol in many ways. A few ideas are presented here:

1. One or more of the characters could be an acquaintance of Oscar Metenier. They receive a letter that gushes with enthusiasm for his new project, which he calls the Grand Guignol. The letter invites them to visit him in Paris to experience it for themselves. When the PCs arrive they find that Metenier has moved and left no forwarding address. Someone else owns the Grand Guignol and Metenier supposedly abandoned it because he did not believe it could sustain its novelty. Through some investigation the player characters discover Metenier has gone into hiding and is under heavy guard. The former police secretary has always been a cautious man, hence the bodyguards he kept with him, but now he is completely paranoid that the criminals whom he dealt with while working for the police are out to kill him. Some more investigations by the PCs reveal that some people have bad feelings toward him but no one has enough ill will to go to the trouble of killing him. They do turn up something odd, though. This isn't the first time someone has been asking about who would want revenge on Oscar Metenier. Maurey, in disguise, once scouted out Metenier's friends in an attempt to gain information on his enemies that he could then plant as subconscious suggestions in the frightful mind of the former owner of the Grand Guignol.

2. There seems to be a new disease at large in Paris. It can result in death, and its symptoms include fear and dementia. Many victims have a paranoia about being helped by doctors. So far, the disease has only struck the less fortunate members of society, so the current theory is that the illness might be carried by rodents or some kind of insect. This is backed up by the small red wound often found on the body of the infected people. Curious PCs can discover that most of the victims were living in Pigalle, the red-light district ruled by criminal gangs and populated by pimps, prostitutes, and drug addicts. Most of the abductions can be traced to locations near the rue Chaptal, which ends at the steps of the Grand Guignol.

4. The characters are riding in a coach through the streets of Paris when they hear a scream from somewhere nearby. Suddenly a man runs from a shadowy alley in front of their coach and is trampled by the horses. When they roll the body over they are shocked to see the sheer terror the man's face projects. Clutched in the dead man's bloody fist are the broken remains of a syringe that seemed to have contained nothing but air.

5. Max Maurey decides that his vaccine isn't working because the people he tests it on are too weak to begin with and the vaccine just ends up causing the disease. He requires more stalwart and strong-willed test subjects. The PCs are touring Paris and go to one of the Grand Guignol shows. Maurey chooses the player character who is least affected by the show as his next victim. If that is hard to determine, he attacks the character with the best saving throw vs. paralyzation. In disguise, he assaults the PC at night when he or she is separated from the rest of the group.

5. One of the *faits divers* in the Paris newspapers describes how a woman, delirious with opium, was savagely attacked by a dog. The woman survived but insisted to newspapers that it was not a dog but a monster with three eyes and four mouths. The story is quickly forgotten by the general public, but weeks later the PCs notice a strange hulking little shadow lurking in an alley. It flees toward the other end of the alley when the characters move closer and the shadow vanishes around the corner, leaving most of the player characters to wonder if maybe it was a dog, or if it was real at all. However, one of the PCs is almost certain she caught a glimpse of something brain-like and slimy as the shadow moved from darkness to sunlight.

6. Max Maurey decides that his vaccine isn't working because no one in the theater feels real terror. In order to inspire the fear he needs, Maurey decides to kill one of his actresses. To this end, he devises a horror play in which there are only two parts and employs an actor and actress who are known to have feelings for each other. On opening night, Maurey kills the actor and disguises himself as the man and assumes the garb and makeup the man would have worn. He then acts out the brief play and murders the woman on stage in front of nearly two hundred witnesses. Of course, no one realizes this, and the night is a huge success, a success marred only by the rumored elopement and disappearance of the lead actor and actress. Perhaps the PCs saw the famed show, but even they do not suspect anything was amiss—until they stumble across the actress's body. It appears she was killed just like her part in the play. An investigation into the murder mystery reveals many dead ends and surprises. The PCs follow leads that blame the actor, but when his body is found, suspicion shifts toward another actor who was a rival for the actress' favor. Finally, authorities decide a former boyfriend who looked much like the actor is the culprit, but something doesn't seem right. An obscure clue puts player characters on Max Maurey's trail.

For more information on the Grand Guignol look for this book at your local library: *The Grand Guignol: Theatre of Fear and Terror* by Mel Gordan, Amok Press 1988. ■

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

putting life back into the undead

BY MATTHEW HANCOCK

How many times have you set up a horrifying encounter between an undead creature and your players only to have them yawn and mumble,"Oh no, another zombie. Lets get out our axes and kill it?" Any player who has been playing AD&D® for any length of time will have encountered undead. As the saying goes, familiarity breeds contempt. As players begin to view undead as a collection of statistics to be defeated rather than a tortured soul with a history, it becomes consistently more difficult to inspire the fear and horror that should accompany the undead.

So how do you bring back the fear? One way is to reduce the importance of the numbers. As a DUNGEON MASTER, you need to get the characters focusing on the undead as an entity, and not as a collection of numbers. A creative DM can make even a chance encounter with zombies a memorable one.

Anyone who watches horror movies knows that the setting surrounding a creature is as important as the creature itself. Use descriptive language to describe what your PCs see. For example, instead of informing your party that they are in a swamp, describe the sickly trees that emerge from the shallow, murky water, the faint light that permeates the rolling dark clouds above, the vines and branches that hang down from the canopy that momentarily obscures the PCs vision as they brush past their face.... Your players will start wondering about what could be hiding under the water or what will appear in front of them as the branch passes by, and that's all you need to do. If you leave it at that, the players' imaginations will begin filling in the blanks, and that can be scarier than any scenario you could think up. Then, when everyone has had time to digest your earlier description, quietly inform them that all of the animal noises have stopped, and watch the fun begin. Limiting the vision of the PC's through the use of darkness, fog or obstructions heightens their paranoia.

DARKNESS

Darkness is the easiest way to obscure vision. It also is the easiest to counter. Whether it is a torch, a lantern, or a coin with *continual light* cast upon it, any group worth their experience points will have a means of creating light. This can be used against them. Torches create a lot of constantly flickering shadows. Describe the shadows in a sinister manner and watch your players begin to distrust their light source.

Torches also create smoke, which can be used to disguise the advance of a vampire in gaseous form or any immaterial undead. Lanterns create shadows, as well, and the bullseye type has a very directed beam that allows the opportunity for stragglers to be picked off in the darkness.

So, how do you remove the party's light sources? Use hit-and-run tactics by the faster undead, such as a vampire running from the darkness to strike at a lantern; or use mobbing attacks by lesser undead, such as a group of zombies or skeletons who ignore all attacks and concentrate on the source of light. If you really want to scare your players, have a spectre or similar immaterial undead materialize around the light source, extinguishing it, before immediately retreating. The PCs will be frantically trying to protect their light sources, trembling appropriately when their supply dwindles. Once the PCs are in complete

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

darkness, remember that undead do not make any noise when they move. Unless, of course, they wish to.

Many PC races have infravision, and may rely on that when the lights go out. They are in for the biggest surprise yet. On their best day, most undead are room temperature, and blend in quite well with the background. Some of the colder ones, any immaterial undead or those with a cold attack, may still be detectable, but it will not be easy. Put them in front of a nice cold stone wall and they are invisible. Picture the party's reaction when the character with infravision that they were relying on is suddenly carried off into the darkness by something none of them could see.

FOG

Though fog is not as easy to create as darkness, the effects can be even greater. It is very difficult to dispel fog, and creating light only makes things worse, as anybody who has turned on their high-beams in a fog can attest to. Heavy fog and mist also dulls and warps sound, making it very difficult to determine where it came from. It is very easy for a party to become separated as they loose sight of their comrades and any voices seem to come from all sides. Undead do not suffer from these problems due to their keen senses. Immaterial and non-sentient undead have replaced their normal senses with the ability to sense life, and cannot be fooled by natural conditions. Other undead have keener senses to rely on. Ghouls can smell the PC's; vampires can hear the beat of the PC's heart or smell the blood that flows through their veins.

> Remember that being undead has some extra advantages not listed in the *Monster Manual.*

OBSTRUCTIONS

This can be perhaps the most terrifying method of robbing the PCs' vision, as they are able to see normally and yet they still cannot see clearly. The PCs' vision can be limited numerous ways: thick foliage in a forest, a continuous blanket of old spider webs in a tunnel, or a room filled with furniture of assorted sizes covered by white sheets. As the characters press onward, they are never quite sure what may appear in front of them next. Though the rear characters can see fine, it is very slow and tense going for the character in the lead. In the case of covered furniture, who's to say that there's not something hiding underneath the sheets? You can bet that the PCs will be thinking about that.

UNDEAD AND COMBAT

When the PCs finally engage the undead, continue to use vivid descriptions. Remember that being undead has some extra advantages not listed in the *Monster Manual*. For example, zombies will not try too hard to defend themselves in a fight. They don't feel any pain, so unless specifically instructed, they don't care if they are hit. This can be very disconcerting for a PC as a zombie pulls itself up the length of the spear it is skewered on or grabs the handle of the axe that just split its skull. As well, the undead do not get tired. Skeletons will give chase until they have either caught or driven away their prey, or a wight will crouch, watching the party for hours without moving, waiting for the proper moment to strike.

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

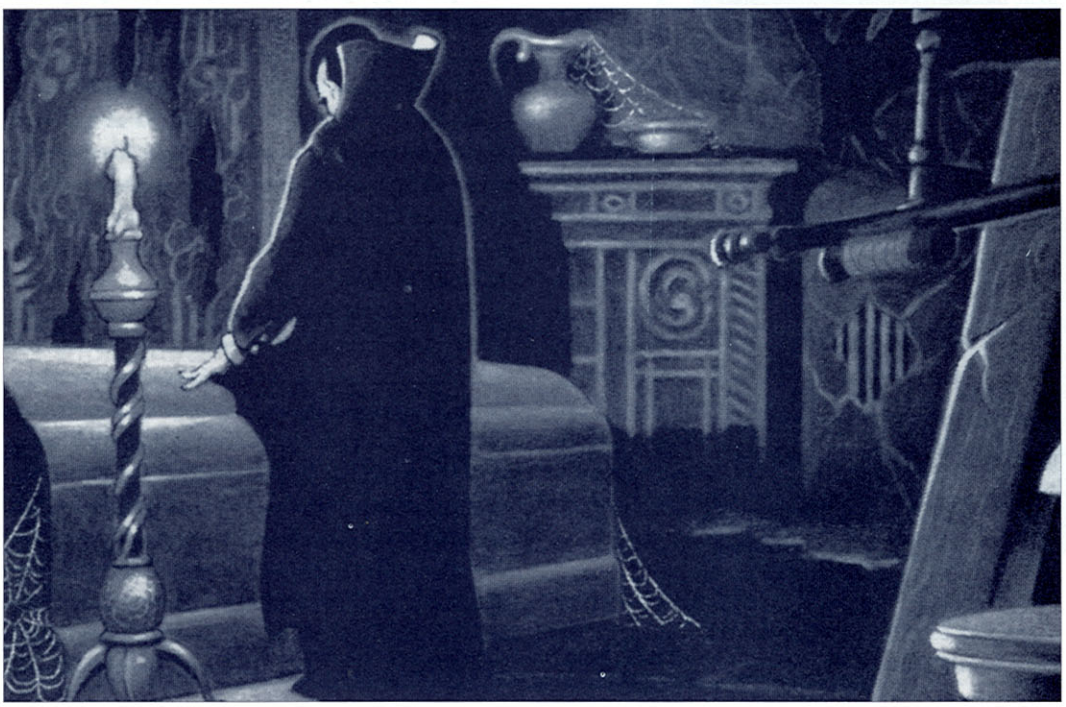
Even when a character becomes too powerful for weaker undead to be challenging, they still can be scary. Picture a 10th-level Fighter versus 10 skeletons. This should be a no contest fight, with the skeletons falling in short order. However, if instead of rolling some dice and saying the skeletons miss 10 times, describe the skeletons as *"relentlessly attacking, pushing in from all sides, clawed fingers questing for the eyeholes of your helmet, drawing thin lines of blood from any exposed surface."* The player may begin to feel nervous. Sometimes a problem arises when the undead is too powerful for the PC's. For example, you want to use a wight but its level drain could potentially weaken the party to the point where they are unable to finish the adventure. Instead of fudging rolls or changing the wight's energy drain, use some of the above ideas to give the PC's a memorable encounter without worrying about energy drain. Compare this round of combat: *"The wight leaps from the top of the tomb and swings at your fighter,"* to this one: *"The gray-skinned creature leaps from the top of the two-story tomb and lands effortlessly. The creature stays crouched, looking at the party with its white, dead eyes as if waiting for something."* (One of the fighters decides to attack) *"You charge the creature, swinging your sword. As your blow is about to land, the creature springs into action and catches the blade with its hand."* (The weapon was powerful enough to damage the creature, so damage is rolled.)*"It closes its hand around your sword and with a powerful tug rips it from your grasp, throwing the blade into the night."*

In the first example, if the attack hits you have to determine whether you want the character to loose the level. Next round, if the creature hits again you'll have to make the same decision. The energy draining attack becomes more depressing than frightening as the PCs watch their levels dwindle. The creature's special attack becomes more feared than the undead itself. In the second example, the PCs are not sure what they are fighting, so any fear generated is caused by what the creature does rather than by what it is. The wight has performed an effective attack, and yet there is not any risk of energy drain. Next round the wight could pick up the disarmed PC and throw him at another—perhaps the priest as she attempts to turn it.

If the undead is a vampire, you could make the drain occur only in the event of a bite. This gives the vampire a goal to work toward and the PCs something to desperately avoid. If the abilities of non-corporeal undead cause problems, make the fight about completing a quest to bring them final peace rather than a slugfest to the death. A ghost, for example, could guide the PC's with subtle hints or clues, reserving its attacks for when the party strays too far from the quest, or it needs to vent its frustration at the PCs slow progress. It doesn't always have to be about reducing the creature to zero hit points—victory over the undead can come in many forms.

DO RESEARCH

When you're planning an undead encounter, do some research to help set the mood. Read up on the real-life legends of the undead you wish to use, or read a horror novel for good examples of vivid storytelling. Movies are also an excellent source of information. For the effect setting and a lack of visibility can have on a party, watch *The Blair Witch Project*. *The Changeling* and *Stir of Echoes* feature good examples of ghosts using humans to get their revenge. Whatever you do, make sure that everybody has fun. Remember, it's not about beating the life out of the PCs. It's about frightening the life out of them. ■



02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

Brad awoke with a start. What the hell was that? *He jumped out of bed and grabbed the Beretta M92S from his bedside table. "No one can get in here," he muttered to himself. "I made sure I locked everything up before I came to bed."*

He crept out into the lounge room of his apartment. The room was lit by the glow of the orange fog light on the street; the venetian blinds cast striped shadows across the room. A train rumbled past behind the building, rattling the windows.

Brad padded silently over to the door and checked the locks. Everything's just like I left it. I must have been hearing things.

A mug rattled quietly in the sink. Must be those damn mice again! *Brad crept across the lounge room, stopping just next to the door. He nudged the door open slightly with his left hand and pushed the barrel of the pistol through with his right.*

An amorphous shape swelled from the kitchen sink, flowing over the edge and down onto the floor. Even in the dim light, Brad could make out the veins that covered its skin.

"What the..." muttered Brad, pushing the door open.

The thing dropped out of the sink with a plop. Within a second, it solidified into a human sized creature and stood up. Its yellow eyes glowed evilly, and it snarled at Brad, its lips pulling back to show two rows of pointed teeth....

without a trace

ASSASSINATION, DARK CONSPIRACY STYLE
BY GEOFF SKELLAMS

KEYHOLE STRANGLERS

Strength:	5	**Education:**	5
Intelligence:	7	**Initiative:**	4
Empathy:	4	**Hits:**	20/40
Skill/Damage:	7/4 (-/-)	**Agility:**	9
Special Abilities:	Dissolution, Human Empathy, and Psychic Invisibility	**Charisma:**	3
		Move:	3/10/20 (2*)
		# Appearing:	1

Constitution: 7

The figures in parentheses are for use when the Keyhole Strangler is in "liquid" form.

There are times when the Dark Lords find it expedient to quietly do away with a human who is too close to the truth. While it is possible that the individual in question could be harassed by corrupted authorities (such as elements of the police or intelligence community), there are times when killing the person quickly can resolve a situation far more effectively.

The Keyhole Stranglers are a race of Dark Minions who perform wetwork for the Dark Lords. They usually are assigned to cases in which the target is overly paranoid, and cannot be eliminated by a simple "accident."

THE NAME

The name "Keyhole Strangler" first came about after one of the first assassinations by this race. The victim was found brutally strangled, lying behind the front door of his apartment. There was no sign of forced entry, and given the position of the corpse, it was not possible for someone to have murdered the victim and exited through the door. Investigators at the scene were quoted as saying that the victim must have been "strangled through the keyhole." Since then, any unexplained stranglings in which the victim has been found in a secure location have been attributed to the "keyhole strangler."

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Unlike most Dark Minions, Keyhole Stranglers are remarkably human-like. Slightly taller than the average human, their dark skin gives them the appearance of an African American. However, they only tend to emerge at nights and never in well-lit areas; this may be because their skin appears to be dark blue when seen under bright lights.

All Keyhole Stranglers wear some form of dark glasses when they are out in public, in order to hide their glowing, yellow eyes. Some pose as blind men, while others prefer to be more fashionable. However, without the glasses, they give away their real nature.

The fingers of a Keyhole Strangler are extremely long and exceptionally strong, capable of easily crushing a human larynx within seconds. They also have two rows of extremely sharp teeth that are constantly being replaced, much like a shark's.

To approach their targets, the Stranglers usually make use of their dissolution ability, liquefying themselves and oozing through tight spaces. In this form, they resemble a blueish-gray pile of shapeless flesh, criss-crossed with deep purple veins. Most people who see a Strangler in its liquid form usually have to fight to keep their last meal down.

The Stranglers are extremely vulnerable when they are in their liquefied form, especially to heat. Consequently, they tend to remain in this form for only as long as it takes to gain access to their prey.

MODUS OPERANDI

A Keyhole Strangler usually is sent to dispatch an individual who is extremely paranoid about security and who makes sure that there are no openings available for an enemy to exploit.

The Strangler normally begins by keeping a close watch on the target, in order to learn their habits and specific locations. Once it knows the target's schedule, it moves in for the kill.

It waits until the target is locked up, usually at night. Then, it transforms into its liquid form and squeezes through whatever openings it can find. These can include (but are not limited to) kitchen drains, sewer pipes, air-conditioning ducts, gas pipes, etc. The actual diameter of the opening is insignificant to the Strangler. It can stretch out its liquid form and

squeeze through openings as small as a keyhole if need be. However, the wider the opening, the faster the Strangler can move through it.

Once access has been gained, the Strangler transforms back to its physical form and closes in for the kill. It normally strikes quickly and brutally, usually strangling the victim if at all possible, although they have used knives and other such weapons on rare occasions.

The Keyhole Stranglers are an unusually sadistic race, and they relish the look on the face of a dying victim; a Strangler will not kill unless it can see the victim's face clearly. Normally, this means the Strangler will attack from the victim's front, although they have been known to sneak up behind someone who is looking in a mirror.

Once the target has died, the Strangler will leave the scene the same way that it entered. They do not stay at the murder site for long; as soon as the victim is definitely dead, they leave as quickly as possible. Keyhole Stranglers have been known to be able to gain entrance to a location, murder the target and make their escape within five minutes.

USING KEYHOLE STRANGLERS

There are a number of ways to use the Stranglers in your campaign.

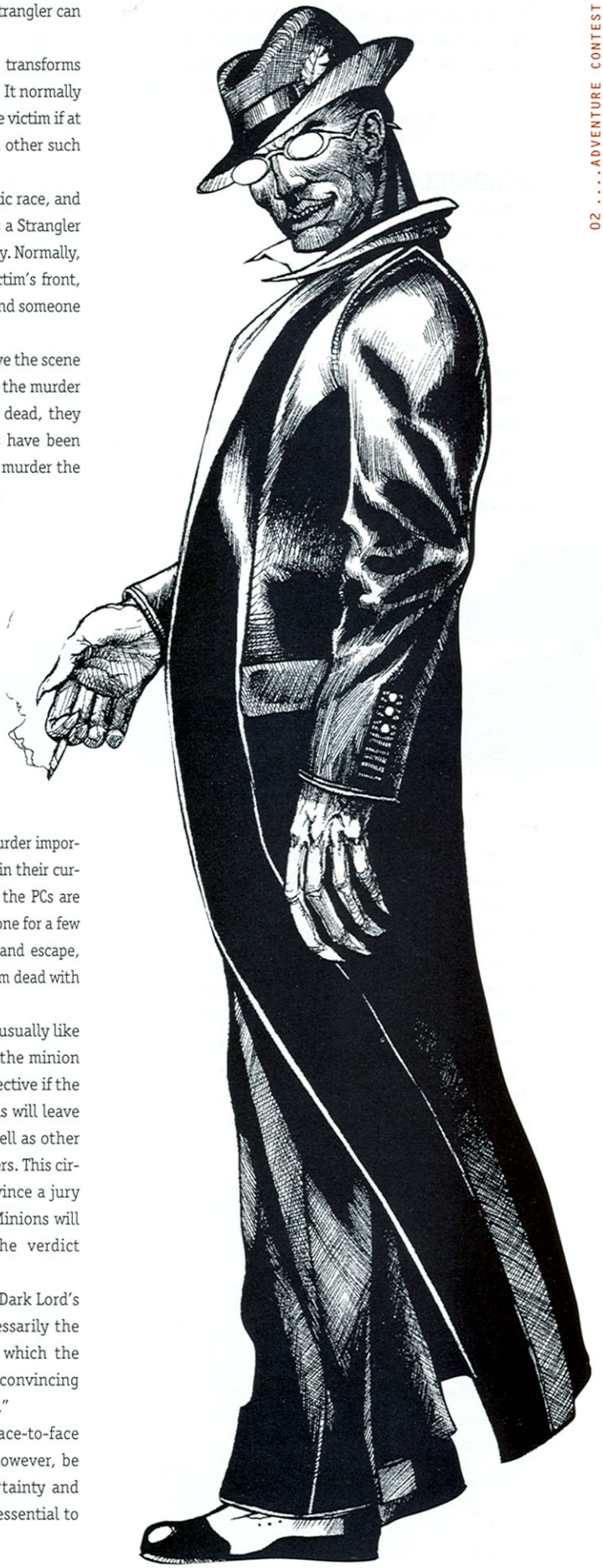
The most obvious way is as a direct threat to the players. This could happen if the players are getting too close to the truth, as far as the Dark Lords are concerned. Late one night, a Strangler will ooze through a drain to where one of the PCs is and attempt to strangle them.

A more subtle approach is to have a Strangler murder important NPCs that the player characters are relying on in their current missions. This can be extremely disturbing if the PCs are guarding an NPC at night and they leave the NPC alone for a few minutes—long enough for the Strangler to strike and escape, leaving only a corpse and the shock of finding victim dead with no real clues as to how it happened.

To further complicate things, the Dark Lords usually like to follow the assassination with the framing of the minion hunters with the murder. This is particularly effective if the PCs are guarding the target to some extent. This will leave their fingerprints all over the crime scene, as well as other physical evidence, such as hair and clothing fibers. This circumstantial evidence is usually enough to convince a jury the accused PC is guilty. If need be, the Dark Minions will fabricate other evidence to ensure that the verdict is assured.

The police in question are usually under the Dark Lord's influence to some extent, but this is not necessarily the case. There has been more than one case in which the police simply were deceived by an extremely convincing minion who played the role of the "eye-witness."

If used properly, the PCs may never come face-to-face with a Keyhole Strangler. The creatures can, however, be used effectively to increase the level of uncertainty and paranoia within a game session, two elements essential to a good horror scenario. ■



ILLUS. TED BEARGEON

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 ....NOTES FROM HQ
30 ....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 ....INTERNET 101
32 ....READER SURVEY

"The legendary basilisk has long been feared for its ability to transform men into stone statues. It is said that a man who meets the petrifying gaze of one of these reptilian horrors without blinking and survives unscathed is either a lucky fool or the type of man upon whose shoulders empires are built."

—Khollas Tandrymson of Myratma, excerpts from Secrets Learnt at Dagger Point (written in the Year of the Shadowtop, 1314 DR)

MEN of the basilisk

BY ERIC L. BOYD

CHRONICLER'S NOTE

Cloak & Dagger, the newest FORGOTTEN REALMS® product, reveals the secrets of many clandestine groups that haunt the shadows of the Forgotten Realms, ever plotting to increase their power, wealth, and influence. Whether they are considered to be assassins, information brokers, merchants, slavers, spies, thieves, or even monsters, these groups constitute the invisible hand behind many of the mysterious events that shape the unfolding history of Faerûn.

Economic activity along the Sword Coast, the Shining Coast, and the shores of the Sea of Fallen Stars has long been driven by competing mercantile powers. Although independent merchants can earn a prosperous living if they are both lucky and smart, the majority of merchants choose to join some form of guild or trading coster for protection, a chance to monopolize markets, and to establish contacts with potential trading partners. Most such mercantile organizations operate openly and largely within the law, but a few such groups, including the Iron Throne, the Rundeen, and the Knights of the Shield, seek to enrich their coffers by engaging in illicit and corrupt activities.

This article reveals the hidden practices of one such group, the Men of the Basilisk. First discussed in the original *Forgotten Realms* boxed set and given a brief treatment in *Cloak & Dagger*, this secret society of merchants and titled nobility is a growing power in the western Inner Sea region from the Merchant Kingdom of Sembia to the Caravan Cities of the Chionthar river valley.

MEN OF THE BASILISK

A.K.A. The Eyes of Eight, the Company of Jade

Group Mark: The seal of the Men of the Basilisk is a reptilian eye from which eight symmetric basilisk legs emerge, each bending clockwise. This seal is commonly carved into coin-shaped stone disks made from shards of valuable hardstones, including iris agate, marble (calcite), meerschaum (sepiolite), pipestone (catlinite), psaedros (lepidolite), and tempskya, with the owner's private mark carved into the flip side of the coin.

Group Colors/Livery: The traditional colors of the Men of the Basilisk are dull yellowish-brown and luminescent pale green. The group's livery, worn only during its assemblies, consists of a hooded dull yellowish brown cloak and a lizardskin mask inset with slitted emerald lenses.

The Men of the Basilisk are a group of wealthy, powerful merchants and nobles with a taste for adventure. Their all-male secret society draws its name from a ritual of admission said to involve staring a basilisk straight in the eye. Preferring the dagger in the night to blades bared in the high sun, the members of this group use murder, torture, bribery, and fear to further their fortunes in the intrigues of Cormyr, Sembia, Westgate, and Iriaebor. Thought to be based in Teziir, although few members actually reside in that port city, the Men of the Basilisk meet at large feasts once each winter, to discuss common business and decide on their actions in the year ahead.

GOALS

The Men of the Basilisk are selfish in nature, concerned with the ruthless advancement of their personal fortunes and the suppression of rivals. The only ideal the group espouses is working in concert toward the advancement of their collective fortunes. Most, if not all, members hold a strong sense of loyalty to the rest of the brotherhood that far outweighs any other ties, and the group works in common cause to advance the economic, political, and social interests of all of its members. Additionally, the Men of the Basilisk expend a great deal of effort keeping details of the group's existence and practices secret.

HISTORY AND MOTIVATIONS

Beginning circa 620 DR, a group of wizards later known as the Sword Heralds created a series of extra-dimensional refuges for the various noble families of Cormyr, although not all were intended to serve as safeholds. One such site was constructed in the Year of the Fanged Beast (640 DR) in the form of a labyrinth for the amusement of the jaded young nobles of House Auantiver and stocked with all manner of monstrous creatures. In the Year of the Dangerous Game (658 DR), during the reign of King

Draxius "the Neverdying," it became fashionable among the more adventuresome scions of Cormyr's noble houses to run the gauntlet of beasts dwelling in the Auantiver Labyrinth. Four years later, in the Year of the Peoples' Mourning (662 DR), the deaths of the heirs of Houses Bleth, Crownsilver, and Truesilver precipitated an abrupt end to the practice.

In the Year of the Purple Basilisk (1247 DR), an all-male band of adventuresome lordlings, known as the Company of Jade, stumbled into the long-forgotten Auantiver Labyrinth while exploring the ruins of Battlegate keep near the border of Cormyr and Sembia. Although a score in number, the largely inexperienced members of the band found themselves in a dark stone chasm littered with shattered statues. Undisturbed by the outside world for nearly six centuries, the monsters dwelling within the lost labyrinth of the Sword Heralds had long ago destroyed each other in a vicious struggle for survival until only one creature remained, an unusually long-lived greater basilisk more than thrice the size of its normal kin and with blackened scales of deep purplish cast inherited from a black dragon far back in its family tree. Availing itself of the opportunity to feast on real flesh and not stone from the labyrinth walls for the first time in centuries, the Purple Basilisk destroyed more than half of the original company before eight survivors managed to escape the extra-dimensional locale via a portal that led into the ruins of Teziir.

After their fortuitous escape, the eight lordlings who had survived the Auantiver Labyrinth abandoned the adventuring life and retired to their family estates to inherit the titles and trading empires that were their due. In the years that followed, each man rose to positions of great power and influence in the western Inner Sea region, but none forgot the crucible of the basilisk that had forged their mettle or the comrades who had seen them through that day. Each winter, the eight survivors, who secretly took to calling themselves the Men of the Basilisk, met in clandestine fellowship to relive the memories of their youth and to plot the further advance their collective fortunes.

In the Year of the Crumbling Keep (1276 DR), the aging Men of the Basilisk decided to open their ranks to any promising young noble or merchant lord with enough mettle to survive the same crucible that had shaped their lives. Initially candidates were selected from the elite of Sembian and Cormyrian society, although in time the pool of potential members was expanded to include lords and merchants from the Caravan Cities and settlements along the Dragon Coast. Although the original members of the brotherhood eventually died off, the group retained its essential character as a secret fellowship of powerful, ruthless men drawn together by a taste for adventure and an unshakable bond of loyalty to each other forged by the Crucible of the Basilisk.

Over time, the group has evolved unwritten codes of conduct that require absolute personal loyalty to the brotherhood, short-term self-sacrifice for the long-term collective good, an abiding commitment to absolute secrecy regarding the brotherhood, and a willingness to sponsor or engage in utterly ruthless practices whenever necessary or even just mildly advantageous. Those who cross the group are to be dealt with harshly to serve as a deterrent to others, and those who betray the group are to be destroyed. Forged by these unwritten rules, the Men of the Basilisk have become one of the most powerful and feared mercantile powers in the western Inner Sea lands active in the Realms today.

ORGANIZATION

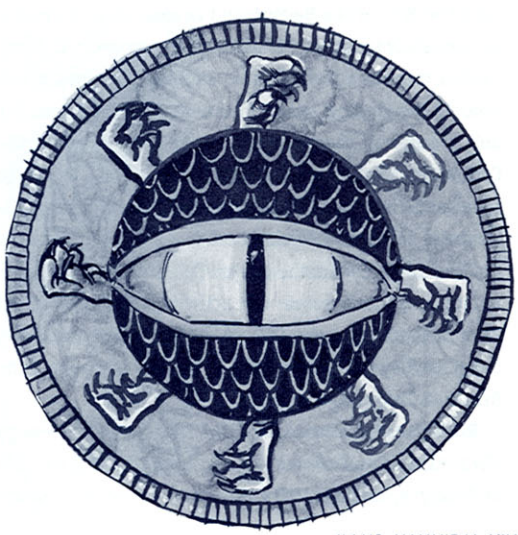
Once admitted into the Men of the Basilisk, all members are considered to be of equal status, regardless of wealth, title, or fame. Members are expected to address each other in private as "Brother" and not by any other title. However, as is the case in most groups, certain individuals rise to positions of leadership and influence within the group by garnering the respect of their fellows.

The Men of the Basilisk are organized into eight regional cells, each of which includes at least one major city. At present, there are cells based in Daerlun, Iriaebor, Marsember, Saerloon, Selgaunt, Suzail, Urmlaspyr, and Westgate. These cells are largely informal in nature, as members can easily switch affiliations at the annual winter meeting, but they do serve to coordinate the activities of members within a geographical region.

CHAIN OF COMMAND

Overseeing the Men of the Basilisk is an administrative body known as the Octad that meets secretly on a bimonthly basis to coordinate the group's activities and to organize the annual winter meeting. Each of the eight cells can nominate a single member to the Octad, who must be confirmed by a vote of the entire membership. Members of the Octad hold two-year terms of office and cannot serve concurrent terms. Such terms are staggered so that four new members of the Octad are selected at each annual meeting.

Members of the Octad are responsible for overseeing and coordinating activities within their local cell as well as communications with other cells. Their chief responsibility is to ensure that no outside person or group is privy to such ongoings. In practice, this oversight gives each Octad member a great deal of effective authority over his fellow cell members and influence within the group at large, even



ILLUS. HANNIBAL KING

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

if the position is not formally seen as conveying a position of leadership.

Four members of the current Octad roster—as of the winter meeting held late in the Year of the Tankard (1370 DR)—are detailed below, and the rest are left for the DM to determine.

Denlarych Wainwalker (LE hm T9), who represents Iriaebor, is as slight, unimposing man of noble birth well known for his amoral charm, youthful good looks, and harp-playing skill. As a youth, Denlarych organized and led the Gentleknaves, a band of rogues of noble birth who terrorized the Iriaeben elite for several seasons by abducting the young daughters of powerful merchant and noble families and holding them ransom for prized family heirlooms. The young women were always returned unharmed if the ransom was paid (and it always was), but the symbolism of the payments demanded demonstrated the cruelty of the kidnappers and their indifference to wealth. (A typical ransom demand might ask for the ashes of the late family patriarch or the wedding jewels of the missing girl's mother.)

Now in his mid-forties, Denlarych retains his charm but is secretly consumed with avarice and the growth of House Wainwalker's fortune. As a respected, long-standing member of Lords of Iriaebor, Denlarych was secretly instrumental in undermining the nearly successful efforts by Lord Bron and the Harpers after the Time of Troubles to ferret out those members of the brotherhood dwelling in the Overland City. Although the Men of the Basilisk are still forced to operate with the utmost secrecy in Iriaebor, Denlarych has been instrumental in revitalizing the Iriaeben cell in the past year.

Harlyn Grimmerhand (LN hm F11), who represents Daerlun, is a wealthy moneylender and merchant investor who tutors warriors and breeds fine horses to entertain and occupy himself. Harlyn's holdings are widely known to be guarded by golems, and he is said to have worse pets and allies. Although he represents only one city, many members of the brotherhood see Harlyn as the informal leader of the four Sembian cells and thus one of the most powerful members of the Men of the Basilisk.

Most members of the brotherhood would be shocked to learn that Harlyn is also one of the Wearers of the Purple, as the secretive leaders of the powerful Sembian cell of the Dragon Cult are known. Although dual-membership in both the Men of the Basilisk and in rival organizations is not generally tolerated, the Octad long ago decided that it needed to infiltrate the Cult of the Dragon given the two groups' overlapping areas of influence. Harlyn is not the only member of the Men of the Basilisk to infiltrate the Cult, although the identities of the others are unknown to him, but he is by far the most prominent. Harlyn's unparalleled rise within the Sembian cell has enabled the Men of the Basilisk to thwart the Dragon Cult on many occasions. In fact, as Harlyn oversees Cult activities within the ruined keep of Battlegate, the Cult of the Dragon is effectively being used by the brotherhood as unwitting guards of the Auantiver Labyrinth.

Rhiindaerth Emmarask (LE hm Enc11), who represents Marsember, is publicly regarded as an upstanding member of Cormyr's nobility and a respected senior War Wizard active in the defense of Cormyr's southeastern frontier. No one outside of the brotherhood suspects that Rhiindaerth's true loyalties lie with the Men of the Basilisk and not the crown he purportedly serves. Rhiindaerth has long worked to shield the brotherhood's activities in the ruined keep of Battlegate from Cormyr's defenders. More recently, his position enabled the Men of the Basilisk to survive persistent investigations by the War Wizards of Cormyr, although both Cormyrean cells have been forced to greatly curtail their activities as a result.

Rhiindaerth's private passion is the study of the Sword Heralds. He is well-versed in the impenetrable verses left behind that list all of the refuges created by the Sword Heralds, and he has uncovered the secret behind at least one such refuge that lies amidst the canals of Marsember. At present, Rhiindaerth is working to enlist support among the other members of the Octad to fund his personal efforts to acquire one or more additional Sword Herald refuges to serve as safeholds for the brotherhood.

Thessar the Warrior (LN hm F10), who represents Westgate, is a hearty, garrulous bear of a man. A retired mercenary who had a long and storied career in the Dragon Coast region, Thessar resides in a modest house outside the city walls and holds forth every night with tales of his youth from its porch. Bored with inactivity, the aging warrior has taken up with the Men of the Basilisk and has taken advantage of the Night Masks' recent disarray to quietly increase the brotherhood's strength in Westgate and thus the influence of the Westgate chapter within the organization as a whole. More details on Thessar and the Westgate cell may be found in Cloak & Dagger.

RANK AND FILE

At any given time, the Men of the Basilisk include more than 150 powerful titled nobles and merchants. A significant fraction of members have previously served as Octad representatives, and many of the brotherhood's rank-and-file members have acquired more influence and effective leadership within the group as a whole than the newly designated members of the Octad. Although only a handful of members are detailed below, the DM should keep in mind that nearly any powerful noble or merchant in the lands where the Men of the Basilisk are active might secretly be a member of this group, even if they otherwise appear to be fine upstanding members of the elite.

Breldar Syndlorn (LE hm T10/F9), once a minor pirate captain who raided weak targets along the coast of Chessenta and in the Vilhon Reach, several years ago became the owner of a six-ship fleet of fast, heavily-armed caravels known among pirates as "reavers" for their powerful ballistae armament. Breldar, the wayward son of a member of Teziir's ruling council of merchants, made the transition from timid pirate captain to Sembian merchant shortly after joining the Men of the Basilisk.

Soon after his induction, Breldar was involved in a merchant's war that was briefly the talk of Sembia and resulted in the death of a Thayan-backed dealer in antique armors and "tomb-scents" named Aelduth who sought to expand into slave trading and trafficking in illegal intoxi-

cants. The Men of the Basilisk, who feared the growing power of the Red Wizards in the Merchant Kingdom, prevailed by secretly backing both Breldar and the head of another faction in the merchant war, a freelance assassin named Fanaeth Torlsar (CE hm T14). (More details on these events may be found in "Elminster's Everwinking Eye" in *Polyhedron* #94.)

In the aftermath of the above-mentioned merchant war, Breldar was elected as the Octad representative for Selgaunt. Although he no longer holds that post, Breldar remains influential within the ranks of the brotherhood in both Selgaunt and Saerloon. However, he is forced to maintain a low profile as the Eyeless Mask, a Thayan-backed rogues' guild active in both cities, still seeks vengeance for his actions. (The Red Wizards are unaware of Breldar's membership in the Men of the Basilisk or the brotherhood's involvement in the affair.) Although still an independent agent, Fanaeth Torlsar is frequently employed by the Selgauntan cell to dispatch its foes, including the occasional visiting Red Wizard.

ILLUS. HANNIBAL KING

Tandarsyn Mhorhune, "the Sorcelisk," (NE hm M14) is a mysterious wizard who dwells in a once-ruined tower in the eastern reaches of the Vast Swamp. Long suspected of having magically shielded himself from the perils of the basilisk's gaze and thus having cheated the Crucible of the Basilisk, Tandarsyn is little trusted by a sizable minority of the brotherhood, and rumors regarding his supposed efforts to crossbreed various sorts of monsters have never abated within the group's ranks. (Such rumors are true, although the only record of such is found in the secret correspondence between Tandarsyn and Asgetrion the Learned, a noted sage of Arabel.) Regardless of the truth, the Sorcelisk's knowledge of monstrous beasts is unmatched among the Men of the Basilisk and his loyalty to the brotherhood is true, so he has been entrusted by the Octad for many years with caring for the health of the Purple Basilisk and ensuring that the monster lives for many years to come.

Tenshorn Hawklin (LE hm F7), the younger and less

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

well-known brother of House Hawklin's current patriarch, accompanied Barandos Hawklin on several of his crown-chartered forays into the Hullack Forest and the Stonelands. Whereas the quick-witted and charming Barandos emerged a distinguished favorite at the Royal Court, whispers of Tenshorn's penchant for cruelty prevented the younger Hawklin brother from also gaining the ear of King Azoun IV.

Embittered by this failure, Tenshorn willingly joined the Men of the Basilisk when offered the opportunity. Since joining the brotherhood, Tenshorn has retained his brother's trust through a façade of friendship and loyalty to the crown. As Barandos' role in court leaves him little time to administer the family holdings, Tenshorn has assumed most of the responsibility for day-to-day management of the House Hawklin's lucrative investments, which are funded in large part by the wealth garnered during the brothers' adventuring career. Although he initially thought of disposing of his elder brother, Tenshorn has grown comfortable with the relative anonymity his position affords him and the opportunities afforded by his ability to enrich himself behind the scenes.

RAW RECRUITS

Admission into the Men of the Basilisk is by secret invitation only. Potential candidates are only approached after an exhaustive investigation of their background and character. The group seeks out wealthy, powerful merchants and nobles from the western Inner Sea region whose loyalties are not clouded by membership in rival organizations and whose methods match their own.

Once selected, candidates are given an ornate dagger and a scroll sealed with the group's mark by a runner who knows nothing of the person who hired him or the nature of what he is carrying. Such invitations are given a fortnight before the annual meeting of the Men of the Basilisk. The dagger is nonmagical and bears the mark of House Auantiver, the three heads of a chimera carved from white marble on a sable-hued shield, although a good deal of research is required to learn the import of this symbol. The scroll, penned with dried basilisk blood and also nonmagical, contains a mysterious invitation to the ruined keep of Battlegate at midnight a tenday hence with an admonition to bring the scroll and dagger but no companions.

ILLUS. HANNIBAL KING

On the chosen night, up to eight candidates who have chosen to accept the invitation assemble amidst the ruins of Battlegate keep. (The Men of the Basilisk keep close tabs on who is actually planning to accept the invitation and quietly work to eliminate those rare few who refuse their offer and reclaim the scroll and dagger given in invitation.) Once all the men matching the specified descriptions have arrived, a *magic mouth* is triggered which directs the assembled lordlings to pass between two specific carved columns in what was once the great hall of Battlegate. Only those persons carrying one of the Auantiver daggers and vellum scroll are whisked into the Auantiver Labyrinth. The scroll is always consumed in the process, but the Auantiver daggers as well as all items borne are left behind in the process. Within a few minutes, members of the brotherhood who have arranged the induction of the candidates arrive to retrieve the items left behind.

Within the Auantiver Labyrinth, candidates for admission must rely on their wits, talents, and teamwork to survive. As it is nigh impossible to actually kill the Purple Basilisk without weapons, armor, spell components, or magic of any sort, the only realistic way to survive the test is to find the exit portal, which deposits surviving candidates, if any, into a secret chamber beneath a warehouse in the city of Teziir. There they are greeted by a like number of members of the group, who welcome the new recruits into the brotherhood, instruct them in the group's practices, and bring them to the annual meeting a few nights later.

METHODS AND ACTIVITIES

As befits a group composed of hereditary nobles and wealthy merchants, the Men of the Basilisk prefer to operate behind the scenes, providing financial backing for other groups that act as their indirect proxies and directly employing the agents of individual members when necessary. Although individual members frequently employ mercenaries to guard their trading interests and properties, as a group the Men of the Basilisk eschew such overt tactics. Instead, the brotherhood seeks to undercut current and potential rivals outside the group and advance its collective fortunes through economic collusion and the discrete use of murder, torture, bribery, and fear.

The primary tactics of the brotherhood are of an economic nature, staying just within the law. As a group, the Men of the Basilisk often collude to undermine their individual trading rivals in ways that cannot be traced back to the primary beneficiary. For example, if a Marsembian member with investments in shipbuilding wishes to undercut the business of a rival shipbuilder who is not part of the brotherhood, he might call on several other Men of the Basilisk with sizable investments harvesting timber from the Hullack Forest to irregularly impede delivery of crucial supplies to his trading rival. Since there is no visible link between the Marsembian shipbuilder and the timber merchants, his rival is apt to attribute his misfortune to Beshaba and not discern the complicity of his rival.

When shady, albeit legal, tactics fail, the Men of the Basilisk are unmatched by most merchant groups in their willingness to employ more bloodthirsty methods and their skill in ensuring that the blame for such attacks cannot be linked back to them. Taking full advantage of the fact that "random" crimes committed by a person or party without any apparent connection to the victim or benefit from the crime are almost impossible trace, the Men of the Basilisk coordinate their attacks so that there is no apparent link between the beneficiary and the fellow member who actually arranged the crime.

For example, the Men of the Basilisk commonly employ assassins such the Night Masks to eliminate competition to their interests. The main beneficiary of an assassination never hires the slayer directly. Instead, someone else within the brotherhood with whom he is not known to be connected will arrange for the hit, making it very difficult to trace the attack back to its instigator. Moreover, members of the brotherhood have found it far more effective to target an employee who serves a critical role in a rival's organization rather than the rival directly, as attacks on politically well-connected rivals usually garner a great deal of attention, whereas the elimination of a prized servant at a critical juncture can wreak just as much havoc without the unwanted public outcry. Likewise, if one member bribes an customs official to look the other way for certain shipments and to show a great deal of diligence when inspecting cargo imported by a targeted rival, the true beneficiary may be someone else entirely, seemingly unconnected to the whole episode, but secretly allied through a shared membership in the brotherhood.

The Men of the Basilisk have been so successful in advancing their individual fortunes by means of such conspiratorial tactics that many individual members have acquired reputations for business sense far exceeding their actual business acumen. In not a few cases, rivals have voluntarily quit the field rather than face one "so blessed by Lady Luck."

BASILISKAN ABILITIES

Drawn from the political and economic elite of western Inner Sea cultures, the Men of the Basilisk have personal abilities that reflect their station. Most, if not all, have received at least a gentleman's training in swordplay, are comfortable on horseback, can read and write with ease, speak multiple languages, have a comfortable understanding of trade and finance, and have received some instruction in the courtly graces of etiquette, dance, and general social interaction among the wealthy and titled elite. In addition to their other contacts, long-time members generally acquire a great deal of experience in anonymously procuring services from the underworld on behalf of the brotherhood.

Most members of the brotherhood were adventurers at some time in their youth, and thus acquired enough skill to acquit themselves well in battle and may have acquired one or more unusual magic items (beyond those acquired through inheritance or purchase). As such, most members who adventured in their youth are now mid- to high-level Warriors and Rogues (i.e. between 5th and 12th level). Although not entirely excluded, Priests are generally shunned as candidates given their obvious loyalties to their faith over anything else. Mages are generally considered to be loners of ill-suited temperament for the group's dynamics, and those who are approached as candidates often fail to survive the Crucible of the Basilisk thanks to the sudden loss of material components for their spells.

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

RESOURCES

The Men of the Basilisk have few resources beyond those possessed openly or secretly by individual members. Nevertheless, the Men of the Basilisk are one of the wealthiest organizations active in the western Inner Sea region given the scope of their individual fortunes and their collective willingness to employ them on behalf of the group. Members of the brotherhood own numerous properties, control vast fortunes, direct fleets of ships and caravans, and wield a great deal of political and social influence in various courts and councils, all of which can be wielded on behalf of the group without drawing undue attention to the brotherhood's existence.

In cases of emergency, trusted servants of each member are instructed to succor anyone who displays one of the unique coins employed by the group without question or restraint. As such, the Men of the Basilisk can always count on unlimited support in times of need within the group's area of influence. The group as a whole harshly penalizes any member who abuses this privilege, and anyone falsely displaying the group's mark is eventually hunted down and killed as a warning to others.

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The only resources controlled directly by the group are the Auantiver Labyrinth and the chapter house. Little is known outside the group about the former property, and all surviving Auantiver daggers are tightly controlled by the Octad, effectively rendering the refuge off limits except to the next batch of candidates. As the extra-dimensional labyrinth is employed solely as a testing ground, it does not provide any direct benefit to the group except as a means of ferreting out weak candidates.

The Basiliskan Chapter-House lies within a secret cellar beneath an otherwise unremarkable warehouse in Teziir's port district. Employed only once per year, this meeting hall is heavily warded by magical and nonmagical means, guarded by a small company of stone golems, and wholly shielded against magical divination or translocation. At great expense, the Men of the Basilisk have financed numerous exits and entrances into the chapter house, most of which date back to before the resettlement of Teziir and thus are wholly unknown to the populace. Moreover, the brotherhood has bribed many key individuals in Teziir's government to ensure that the Men of the Basilisk can come and go to their annual meeting with complete anonymity.

AREAS OF OPERATION

The Men of the Basilisk are based in the western Inner Sea region, including Sembia, Cormyr, the Dragon Coast, and the Caravan Cities, although their business interests encompass much of western Faerûn. The group's headquarters lie within the city of Teziir on the Dragon Coast, but only a few members call that city home. The Men of the Basilisk keep a deliberately low profile in Teziir so that they can conduct their secret annual meetings there without attracting much attention by the authorities or the general populace.

Membership in Cormyr has begun to sag of late, as persistent investigations by the War Wizards have driven the remaining members deep into hiding. However, the group's membership rolls in Sembia continue to grow, thanks in part to the efforts of Harlyn Grimmerhand of Daerlun, the recently elected representative of the Daerlunian cell.

In Westgate, the actions of the Men of the Basilisk are circumscribed by their ongoing feud with the Night Masks, although the leadership of the chapter in that city took advantage of the period following the death of the Faceless, the leader of the guild, to increase their numbers among the resident merchant nobility. The death of many members of Westgate's merchant nobility in the Year of the Banner (1368 DR) shortly before the death of the Faceless resulted in the elevation of several younger brotherhood members to positions of leadership within their families.

In Iriaebor, the group's numbers have rebounded to fifteen or so, after dropping as low as five following the Time of Troubles thanks to the efforts of Lord Bron and the Harpers to ferret out the members of the group.

ALLIES AND ENEMIES

The Men of the Basilisk keep a sufficiently low profile that few groups are aware of their existence, let alone their activities. Nevertheless, the members of this group are fiercely protective of their wealth and influence, so they constantly strive to undermine potential rivals within their area of influence.

The chief foe of the Men of the Basilisk is the Cult of the Dragon. The Dragon Cult's influence in Sembia exceeds that of the Men of the Basilisk, despite the latter group's growing strength in the Merchant Kingdom, and the Cult's depredations have bankrupted more than one merchant who has survived the Crucible of the Basilisk. Rather than risk outright war between the two groups, which the Followers of the Scaly Way would undoubtedly win, the Men of the Basilisk have secretly bankrolled the efforts of independent groups to fight the Cult of the Dragon. While such efforts will never be enough to destroy the Dragon Cult entirely, they do serve to distract and weaken the Followers of the Scaly Way, giving the Men of the Basilisk time to grow in strength and number.

Unlike the Cult of the Dragon, which has long been recognized as a threat to the fortunes of the Men of the Basilisk, the Iron Throne is still seen as a relatively unknown entity. The Men of the Basilisk recognize that

there is an inherent threat in this group's rather sudden rise in influence, but to date neither group has infringed on the other's areas of interest. As such, the Men of the Basilisk have proceeded cautiously in their interactions with the Iron Throne, and, for now, the brotherhood seeks only to discover the identities of the mysterious leaders of the Iron Throne and their true goals. However, cautious inquiry will rapidly give way to covert war should either group conclude that their interests are being harmed or that the other group could be defeated at no great cost.

Although similar in nature, the Knights of the Shield and the Men of the Basilisk have long seen one another as rivals to be absorbed or crushed. Over the past two decades, both groups have been expanding their representation in the Caravan Cities, and battles between their proxies are increasingly common in dark streets of Iriaebor. At present, neither group has the upper hand, but the efforts of Lord Bron and the Harpers to curtail the activities of the Men of the Basilisk following the Time of Troubles weakened the group at a critical juncture. At their most recent meeting, the Men of the Basilisk endorsed the efforts of the Iriaeben cell to identify leading Knights and directly target them for assassination in direct violation of the de facto agreement between the two groups to wage their battles through proxies.

> The Cult of the Dragon's depredations have bankrupted more than one survivor of the Crucible of the Basilisk.

Perhaps the most obvious targets of the enmity of the Men of the Basilisk are the numerous trading costers that trade throughout the western Heartlands and along the Sword Coast. The Men of the Basilisk have a distinct advantage over such overt rivals, for their secrecy and utterly ruthless tactics are unmatched by most merchant consortiums. Covert efforts by the Men of the Basilisk have contributed to the decline of the once-powerful Merchant's League of Baldur's Gate, and significantly undercut the nascent Firehands Group of Daerlun. Harlyn Grimmerhand is the chief architect of the latter effort, and he is particularly pleased that the raids and sabotage that have plagued the Firehands Group have been successfully blamed on the Iron Throne.

STATUS QUO

The Men of the Basilisk are presently in a state of flux, with the Cormyrian and Iriaeben cells in decline and the Sembian and Westhavian cells ascendant.

In Daerlun, efforts by the Men of the Basilisk to undermine the Cult of the Dragon continue to bear fruit, although the risk that the Followers of the Scaly Way might gain an inkling of the brotherhood's hand in recent setbacks is increasing. Harlyn Grimmerhand has recently received approval from the brotherhood to hire adventuring companies to slay Nevalarich, a red dragon of the Thunder Peaks who is becoming well known for his frequent raids on ships traversing the Neck and whose depredations are adversely impacting the fortunes of the Men of the Basilisk. This decision was made after a great deal of discussion, for Harlyn revealed that Nevalarich was acting an agent of Auglorosa, possibly the most powerful and by far the most crafty dracolich affiliated with the Sembian cell of the Dragon Cult. If the red wyrm can be slain, then the brotherhood will have scored a dual victory by eliminating an impediment to trade and by destroying a likely candidate for conversion to the status of Sacred One. However, if their involvement is revealed—Auglorosa is thought to be more dangerous in that regard than the Wearers of the Purple—then the Men of the Basilisk might find themselves drawn into a full-scale war with the Cult of the Dragon and its Sacred Ones.

Similarly, members of the Selgauntan cell have scored several important victories over agents of the Red Wizards of Thay in recent years. Most recently, a Basiliskan spy within the Eyeless Mask revealed that Naglatha, a woman previously thought to be a highly successful Selgauntan merchant and trader in curios and antiques, is in truth the leader of most covert operations by the Red Wizards within Sembia. Breldar Syndlorn leads a faction of the Selgauntan cell advocating that Fanaeth Torlsar be hired to dispatch of her, but cooler heads within the brotherhood think that to assassinate her would be counterproductive, as a known enemy is less dangerous than an unknown replacement would be. No course of action was agreed upon at the most recent annual meeting, so for now the Men of the Basilisk just continue to observe.

In Iriaebor, the turf wars between the Knights of the Shield and the Men of the Basilisk continue unabated and threaten to spiral wholly out of control. Denlarych Wainwalker has recently discovered circumstantial evidence suggesting that Lord Bron's drive to oust the Men of the Basilisk from the Overland City a decade ago was sparked by carefully planted rumors spread by agents of a caravan-master named Piyrathur, whom the brotherhood has long suspected of being a member of the Knights of the Shield. Now Denlarych is seeking a skilled assassin to kill Piyrathur. Meanwhile reports have trickled back to Piyrathur and his fellow Iriaeben Knights suggesting that a prominent member of the merchant council is behind a series of bandit raids in the vicinity of the High Moor that have targeted caravans bound for Waterdeep backed financially by individual Knights. Piyrathur hopes to outbid the rival group and turn the bandits against Basiliskan-backed caravans. Both groups will increase the virulence of their counterattacks in response to every provocation, and neither has yet realized that an unknown third party is feeding incendiary (albeit factual) reports to both parties in order to further inflame the conflict. ■

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

Hello! Welcome to the first-ever print version of RPGA.com's *Weekly Roleplaying Article*, a fun and interactive look at the ins-and-outs of all kinds of gaming, published online each and every week at the ROLEPLAYING GAME ASSOCIATION® Web site.

I say interactive because the column, whilst penned by yours truly, is reader-driven. Readers choose the topics covered, then guide the process with feedback and responses, several of which are published each week in the *mailbag* section.

Fun because aside from hard-hitting commentary, the yet-unnamed *Weekly Roleplaying Article* offers more than the usual read, including the funny or odd-ball *moment of the week* from my own gaming experiences as well as *weekly musings* and, of course, the *weekly question*.

The editorial offers a unique perspective on gaming—that of the readers, and it gives gamers a chance to share their experiences and get their burning, but not sage-requiring, questions answered.

This special *Polyhedron* edition of the column is being brought to you in the hopes that you'll like what you see, then see what you're missing and come visit us at RPGA.com, have a look at the archives, and maybe come back each week to see the new stuff. It's only with the contributions of readers, gamers, and RPGAers everywhere that this works, and what better place to find readers, gamers, and RPGAers than this magazine?

evil is as evil does

THE WEEKLY ROLEPLAYING ARTICLE—POLYHEDRON-STYLE

BY ERIC BENNER

To whet your appetite and give a fair sample of what goes on each week, I'm going to address one of the issues most often touched-upon in the article. It is continuously brought up as a subject for discussion because, frankly, everyone's got something to say about it. If you've ever had to deal with it, you know exactly why that is.

I speak of evil within the player party.

It comes in many forms. That helm you saw the warrior adorn only moments before his behavior changed erratically. The mysterious man who doesn't come out during the day and doesn't like your special garlic stew and who had words with the rogue just before he started disappearing at night, too. The druid, whose actions sometimes seem just anti-good enough that it makes you wonder. All these are problems the run of the mill hero, if there is such a thing, has to deal with every day.

When it's someone he knows, though, someone with whom he is very close, someone not under the effects of a *helm of opposite alignment*, a vampire's charm, or the erratic behavior of a tree-hugger, then, my friend, it's a completely different story.

One becomes forced to watch one's own back incessantly. Bickering and squabbling over treasure are replaced by threats of violence, and, worse, acts. Suddenly, the mischievous thief doesn't seem quite so bad anymore. Now you've got an assassin in the party. Suddenly, the inane and inept leadership of a do-gooder paladin seems like a god-send. Now you'd do anything for order like that. Functioning as a group becomes impossible.

Many sleepless nights result. You insist on taking double watches because you don't want to be asleep when the assassin takes his watch, and every time you wander into a room you're caught off-guard by the enemy as you keep your attention on the seemingly-unheroic warrior, watching for treasons.

People have all kinds of opinions when it comes to evil in the party. Trust me, I've heard them all.

It's almost become a microcosm of abstract politics, the battle between the extreme right and the extreme left: the fight between those who believe that evil has no place whatsoever within a heroic party, that it should thus be banned, and those who believe that a player has a right to play his characters in any manner he chooses, and that the DM should never override that one player privilege.

In this particular fight, though, there are no victors.

Both sides have valid arguments. It's senseless to have a shifty character with the morals to back up his personality because it draws away from the game. Instead of focusing on the adventure and the campaign, players are forced to focus on each other. Instead of working together, they work against each other, plotting and planning for the event of their own attempted assassination, or worse, someone else's.

Equally, to force players into pre-determined molds, cookie-cutter ideals and boring heroic stereotypes not only demeans the players but also the game. Not every hero fights for heroism's sake. If they did, there would be far fewer heroes. No, some heroes are made of the stuff of coincidence, trapped in the wrong place at the right time, forced into a situation in which they must do good and rescue the princess and free the prisoners and win the king's battles for some reason completely unrelated to the task.

The necromancer who joins the party to gain knowledge and power but who must contribute to an evil emperor's downfall to do so. The assassin seeking the lost blade of Kalamrique who finds himself owing a debt of gratitude to the party that helps him get it, and who travels with them to pay it off—for the time being.

None of these characters are any less valid as heroes than Sir Launcelot himself, though they may appear a few times more credible and many times more fun.

So which is it? To be, or not to be evil?

As with any semi-complex problem, the answer lies at neither extreme but in the space between them, near the middle.

Banning the alignment of evil is, in some senses, silly. Some players will pout and fret about the decision, and hold it against the Dungeon Master. Others will make

Chaotic Neutral characters and simply play them evilly. Still others will do nothing, but not be happy about it. All that can be avoided by simply allowing the alignment.

Oh, the horror! Think of the poor warriors fighting the brunt of the battle, only to have the assassin finish them off because of some slight they dished out earlier, some minor comment to which the dark rogue took offense. The idea of a campaign, adventure, or even a session ending on such a note is preposterous, and goes completely against the idea of Dungeons & Dragons® and every similar role-playing game.

It seems quite a daunting task to combine the two ideals, to allow free choice of alignments and yet to regulate it to avoid catastrophes.

One such way is to disallow the killing of fellow party members, or perhaps even any harmful act against other player characters. This, too, though, has the disadvantage of restricting player freedom of action, and also causes feuds to fester as the players can never settle it directly, forever waiting for a chance to not heal or tend to a comrade to strike back at him indirectly.

Meanwhile, to allow too much freedom is to ask for the chaos and death and destruction and (most importantly) angered players that will result.

No, the answer lies in the space between of those two alternatives, as well.

As with any game-related problem, the only solution requires the cooperation of all players and of the Dungeon Master.

People never seem to realize that even the most cruel and evil of people have friends. People they trust, people they rely on, even people they like. And it's important, when playing an evil character, to remember that, and to limit confrontation with fellow party members by treating them like party members, like friends. Save your evils for your enemies and let the heroism of the game rest undisturbed.

That concludes today's broadcast. Thanks for reading.

I thank you for reading because without the reader, the writer's talents and efforts go both unseen and unrewarded, and because that goes double for this particular article, which you can find at www.rpga.com. We maintain all the archives there, as well, so you can read about such various subjects as *Dealing with Problem Players, Level Draining Woes, Gaming Limbo*, as well as the *Chronicles* of my own game. That's the most valuable feature of this weekly article—the sharing of insights between gamers, which allows us all to improve our own games through discussion and learning.

The column is updated each week, but at varying times due to the schedules of RPGA staff members. To receive updates when the column is updated, as well as to communicate directly with your fellow gamers and myself, and to learn the latest goings-on with the article and with gaming in general, join the WRPA e-newsletter. It's a free e-mailing that goes straight to your e-mail box, so you'll know exactly when to check the site for the column.

Send a blank e-mail to rpgawra-subscribe@listbot.com to subscribe or contact me at ebenner@hotmail.com, to make any comments or ask any questions you may have. Then check out the weekly article for the *mailbag* and the archives to keep you busy in the meantime. Until then, have a great week! ■

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

ILLUS. TED BEARGEON

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
30 .....MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

You've been an extremely active member of the RPGA® Network for quite a while. How did you get started?

I was in a GANGBUSTERS® tournament at the Gen Con® Game Fair and had advanced to the second round. I found out that the winner of the second round got $40 if they were an RPGA member and a paper certificate suitable for framing if they were not, so I signed up between rounds. When the first RPGA rankings came out, I saw that if I put in a bit of a push, I might become top-ranked, so I played a few more tournaments and have been a top-ranked player since some time around 1987. Vital statistics: 403 RPGA tournaments in more than 50 game systems or settings, 9th level Classic Player. 130 rounds judged in 10 game systems or settings, 6th level Judge. Author or co-author of 22 RPGA sanctioned tournaments, as well as game material for TSR, West End, Mayfair, and 54˚-40' Orphyte. My membership in the RPGA expires in 2100.

just because we have been around forever-but just maybe because we try hard to play well and have learned a thing or two about that over the years. Sure, there are plenty of great role-players out there, young and old, who can best me on any given day and can make me enjoy being bested. My challenge is to be consistent in my performance, but also to be fresh and innovative and interesting with every character I play. I think that this gets harder, not necessarily easier, after you have played 500 different characters over 20 years.

member spotlight

BY STEPHEN H. JAY

DONALD J. BINGLE —INNOVATIVE DINOSAUR AND WINNER OF THE 1999 "BEST OF THE BEST" COMPETITION

What sort of local RPGA activities are you involved in?

We have an RPGA club, The PM Players. The club participates in the Decathlon from time to time. I was also active in the Rocky Mountain Benefit Gamers Association in Denver, which raises money for charity by hosting gaming conventions, including BenCon (Memorial Day Weekend-check it out at www.bengames.org), where I was RPG Coordinator and board member for several years. Long ago, I was on the RPGA's Members Advisory Committee. As to games, I am President of 54˚-40' Orphyte, Inc. (owner of the TimeMaster and Star Ace rpgs, the Wabbit Wevenge boardgames, and a few other things, as well as a distributor of 1st Ed. Chill products (including Black Morn Manor) and Zomax. I am also a small shareholder in Rio Grande Games, which produces English versions of the best European games and has 20 of Games Magazine's top 100 games this year. My favorite board game is Rail Baron, but I also like things like Ricochet Robot, Medieval Merchants, Civilization, and Settlers of Cataan. The only card games I have played much are Sim City and DoomTown. On the RPG side, I enjoy spy games, Paranoia, and various oddball games as a break from AD&D.

Do you prefer Classic or Campaign AD&D Tournaments?

I am "Living Free." I only play classic tournaments. I started playing at conventions and played quite a bit before I tried a campaign with some friends. I just don't enjoy campaigns, at cons or at home. In college I was a Parliamentary-Debater (a new topic every round, with no prep time, with the first speaker allowed to set the debate wherever he or she wanted in time or space). That style really lends itself better to Classic tournaments.

What was the "Best Of The Best" Competition like?

The National competition was an affirmation or vindication that some of us old "dinosaurs" aren't highly ranked

What do you do in your mundane, daily life? Are you a mundane disguising yourself as a gamer, or a gamer disguising yourself as a mundane?

I am a corporate and securities attorney at a major Chicago law firm, though I spent a few years as General Counsel of a high growth restaurant chain and some time writing. I guess I am a gamer who does not try to disguise himself as a mundane. Whenever I have interviewed for jobs, I have included my gaming activities on the resumé and people at work often ask me about my gaming activities (everybody knows I disappear in August for Gen Con). I even had someone ask whether I knew something from gaming that would help in a desperate proxy fight and employed an old Diplomacy maneuver to save the day. Even more fun, the completely legal maneuver was almost immediately thereafter outlawed, meaning no one else can ever gain a proxy fight advantage in the same way. Over the years, many of my mundane friends and co-workers have attended one of the many "Binglefests"—days on end of constant gaming of all types. I am currently trying to peddle a screenplay derived from a gaming scenario my brother and I wrote together, and my gaming has helped garner me an entré to short story writing.

My wife, Linda and my brother, Rich are both gamers. One of our shar-peis was even an RPGA member for a time. It is absolutely fantastic to have a hobby your spouse and your family share. Over the years my gaming activities have introduced me to bunches of wonderful, fun people—from a broader array of backgrounds and occupations than the friends of most mundanes—who have made my life more blessed and definitely more full of laughter. There are things you have to do because they pay you to do it (work), there are things you have to do because you are a responsible person (obligations), and there are things you decide to do because you want to (games). I just can't figure out why everyone isn't a gamer.

Don can be contacted at www.orphyte.com. ■

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
12 .....ELMINSTER
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

internet 101

TRUST NO ONE

BY ED GIBSON

WARNING: some of the pictures and text on these Web sites may be disturbing to young and/or sensitive viewers.

Make sure there's no one else in your house. Lock the doors. Close the blinds. Turn on a radio as loud as it will go. We're going to delve into conspiracies this month, and you can't be too careful. Something bad may happen to us if "they" find out. Access these sites from your local library computer or borrow a friend (but not a good one) or co-worker's computer, so they can't trace these inquiries back to you.

Before we proceed, I'd like to state that I mean no disrespect to anyone who may have lost a loved one in one of these tragedies. These are being presented as examples of popular conspiracies to help you understand the thinking behind the conspiracy.

From Waco, Texas to Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs), from the U.S. Navy shooting down TWA 800 to the death of Princess Diana, many people are quick to suspect a conspiracy in current events. The United States government has fostered an attitude of mistrust in the people due to covering up the health effects of Agent Orange and unauthorized experiments with radioactivity.

A good general site for conspiracies is http://www.conspiracy-net.com. This site has information on many of the most commonly held conspiracy theories. The Princess Diana conspiracy is covered at http://www.conspiracy-net.com/assassinations2.html, including one article which asserts that her death was faked with the knowledge of the royal family. An article which all Dark Matter™ GMs should read is found at http://www.conspiracy-net.com/articles/conspiracies/assassinations/CNCkd006.txt. it includes everything from pagan sacrifice to the New World Order. From TWA 800 (downed by a U.S. Navy missile) to Area 51 and UFOs, Conspiracy Net identifies dozens of conspiracies. A word of warning, the site has tiny green print on a black background and can be painful to read.

On the subject of Dark Matter, the Dark Matter web ring is located at http://members.xoom.com/_XMCM/darkmatterwr/index.htm and links are provided to a variety of sites related to the campaign. I'll spend more time on sites for Dark Matter in a future column.

An excellent site for UFOs, conspiracies and weird phenomena is http://www.ufomind.com, which claims to be the largest UFO Web site on the Net. Their conspiracy page, http://www.ufomind.com/para/conspire, provides a wide selection of links to various conspiracy theories. This site requires a good deal of digging, because it doesn't compile information into a single entry (for example, the Area 51 site promises 391 links). Included among maps and drawings, one can find the alleged Groom Lake (Area 51) security manual at http://www.ufomind.com/area51/org/security/sec_man/. The conspiracy pages also include a number of links for Waco, Oklahoma City, TWA 800, John F. Kennedy, Fluoridation, Biological weapons being spread by jet contrails (no, I'm not making this up—see http://www.ufomind.com/para/conspire/contrail) and a number of other theories.

Here's an interesting site which I've been waiting to use for a few months. Let's say your favorite terrorist group has stolen a nuclear device and plans to detonate it in a major city. What's the impact on your campaign world going to be? For the answer, visit http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bomb/sfeature/mapablast.html. There you can view the results of a nuclear blast (pressure damage and fallout) as mapped around your favorite city.

Are there aliens? The people at http://www.starchild-project.com believe they have the skull of an alien's child. The skull has been carbon-dated at 900 years old. Depending on who you want to believe it is either the skull of an infant alien/human crossbreed or the skull of a severely malformed human child. Visit the site, check out the pictures, and make your own decision.

A nice site to add a bit of realism to your campaign is http://www.ntsb.gov/Aviation/Accident.htm. This site provides on-line summaries of aircraft crash reports. The reports can be accessed by month and year or you can search for specific information in the report. A query on Roswell revealed 42 entries, which seems unusually high. Skim through the entries for ideas. For example, DEN88FA064 summarizes the loss of a plane and death of pilot and two passengers on February 5, 1988. The wreckage isn't discovered until two days later. What was it that they saw and which led to their deaths? What evidence was removed before the wreckage was revealed?

I'd like to close this column with a final conspiracy site. Why do cats always land on their feet when dropped? According to http://www.catsarefrommars.com, this is a mutation arising from their origin on Mars. Have you ever noticed the similarity in the facial features of cats and the "grays"? When compared side by side, the resemblance is striking. This Web site provides extensive evidence including statues of feline visitors in ancient Egypt and photographs of cats on Mars.

That's all for this issue; if you have any questions or or suggestions for future issues, please send them to polyhedron@wizards.com. ■

First their teeth, ***then their minds***!

02 ....ADVENTURE CONTEST
03 .....NOTES FROM HQ
08 .....ELMINSTER
31 .....INTERNET 101
32 .....READER SURVEY

reader survey

WE'RE HERE TO HEAR

Please rank each article or section of the magazine from 1-5 with 1 being "Grumble, grumble!" and 5 being "Hoody hoo!" (In case you were wondering, 1 is bad, and 5 is good, dicechucker.) Please include any other comments you feel are appropriate. All responses received on or before August 1, 2000 will be entered for a drawing to win a free copy of THE SUNLESS CITADEL. Woo-hoo!

RPGA # _____ Name _____

	RATING				
ARTICLE	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Notes From HQ	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Table Talk: Legendary Weapons	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fear Theatre	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Putting Life Back into the Undead	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Without a Trace	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Men of the Basilisk	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Evil is as Evil Does	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Member Spotlight: Donald Bingle	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Internet 101	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Fluoride in the water. The Freemasons. The magic bullet. Multiple roleplaying games based on Buck Rogers. All of these strange happenings have given us reason to look for the puppetmasters behind the events, for the darkness beyond the "truth." Conspiracies can be a powerful force in the real world, just as they can make for interesting roleplaying. We at *Polyhedron* have our own favorite conspiracy...it has to do with a secret mind-controlling substance in the grain of the paper on our mailer cover that will force you to fill out the Reader Survey. Trust no one. Including us.

Polyhedron Reader Response #142
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COMMENTS

We'd like to know your favorite conspiracy! Tell us what secret plans creep you out!

By the way, we're interested in what you thought of this issue. You WILL send in the Reader Survey. You WILL send in the Reader Survey. You WILL send in the Reader Survey. You WILLsend in the Reader Survey. You will send in the Reader Survey. You will send in the Reader Survey. You WILL send in the Reader Survey. You WILL send in the Reader Survey.

Reinforce Your Library! *(cont.)*

88: **TO**: Adv.—Death Pits of Natatiri; *EEE*; **LC**: Diviner's Guild; *TLG*; **AE**: Adv.—The Heart of Evil (Part 1); *ItD*.

89: *EEE*; **AD&D**: Adv.—The Ugly Stick; *TLG*; **AE**: Adv.—The Heart of Evil (Part 2).

91: *EEE*; **AD&D**: Adv.—Shhh!; **LC**: The Swineherd's House; *TLG*; *ItD*; *WGP*; Necromancer Items.

92: **LC**: Vast Brewing Company, Jenette LeFleur; **AD&D**: Adv.—River Rats (**GH**); **AQ**: Magic Items; *ItD*, *TLG*.

93: **FR**: Adversaries; **SW**: Crystal Web Station; New Monsters; *EEE*; **LC**: The Viper, **Adv.**—Tower Aqueduct; *TLG*; *ItD*.

97: **LC**: Mayor Charles O'Kane, The Hand of Mercy and Merigold's Menagerie; *ItD*; *WG*; **SW**: Adversaries; **AD&D**: Adv.—Your Tax Dollars at Work; *TLG*.

98: **LC**: The Ministry of Art, Ambassador Carrague, The Sable Feather, The Raven Express; **AD&D**: Adv.—A Handful of Dust; *EEE*; *TLG*; *WG*.

99: **DS**: Coinage, New Weapons, Templars of Tyr; **AD&D**: Adv.—Enemy of my Enemy (**DS**); **SW**: Lightsabers; *WG*; *ItD*; *TLG*.

100: **DL**: The Shadow of a New War, Magical Weapons of Krynn; **SW**: The Tyaonon Ranger; **PS**: The Analects of Sigil; **SJ**: Gorlash Spacescum; **ED**: Cult of the Great Hunter; **AD&D**: Adv.—The Tower of Gold (**AQ**), Adv.—Pumpkin Charley (**RL**); **AE**: Kromosome Update; **DC**: New Professions; **MY**: Mindflayers; **DS**: New Psionic Item; **CH**: Crimebuster; **SR**: New Archetypes.

101: Encyclopedia Magica Preview; Adversaries; **LC**: Lord Blacktree; **AD&D**: Adv.—Turkey Feathers; *TLG*; *WG*; *EEE*; **GW**: War Machines; **GH**: The Suel Lich.

102: **Living Jungle** Preview Issue; City Sites Preview; *WG*.

103: **FD**: Amaunator; **LC**: The Horse Business; *WG*; **SW**: Prophets of the Dark Side; *EEE*; *TLG*; **LJ**: Sticks and Stones.

104: *FD*: Karsus; *EEE*; **SW**: Dangers from the Dark Side; **LC**: Military Forces of Ravens Bluff, Spath Investigations, *WG*; *TLG*.

105: *FD*: Garagos; *EEE*; **TO**: Weapons of Reality; **LC**: Misti's Moonlight Pawnshop, Talon's Tatoo Parlor; **RL**: Gothic Heroes; *WG*; *TLG*.

106: *FD*: Ibrandul; *EEE*; Gulliver's Travels; **BU**: New Creatures; *VD*; **RL**: More Gothic Heroes; *WG*; *TLG*; Magic Items.

107: *FD*: Moander; Magic Items; *EEE*; **VS**: Campaign Introduction; **RL**: More Gothic Heroes; *WG*; *TLG*; New Ranger Kits, Mental Anguish.

108: *FD*: Sebek; *EEE*; **BR**: Races of Cerilia; **LJ**: Errata, New Proficiencies, Useful Plants; **SW**: Ethical Dilemmas of Force Users; *VD*, *DC*, *WG*, *TLG*.

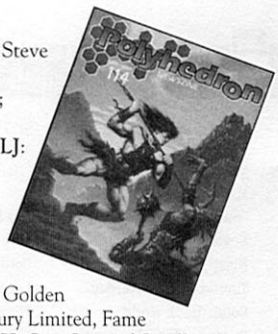
109: *FD*: Sharess; *EEE*; **BR**: More Races of Cerilia; **ToL**: Campaign Introduction; *TLG*.

110: *FD*: Deep Duerra; *EEE*; **LC**: Knighthoods of Ravens Bluff, Heraldry of the Vast, Map of Ravens Bluff, Laws; *WO*, *TLG*.

111: *FD*: Grond Peaksmasher; *EEE*; **DD**: Game Rules and Preview; **BR**: Domain Sourcebook Overview; The Future of the Living City.™

112: Living Death Kickoff Issue; *FD*: Selvetarm; *WO*.

113: *FD*: Shiallia; **LJ**: Jungle Tales; **AD&D**: Adv.—A Pirate's Life for Me; *WO*.



114: Remembering Steve Glimpse; **DL**: Death's Teeth; *WO*; *FD*: Sseth/Vaerae; **LJ**: Jungle Tales; **DL5A**: Game Preview.

115: **LC**: Temple of Tempus, Knights of the Golden Rooster, Mercury Limited, Fame Points; *WO*; **EV**: City-State of Caryllon; *EEE*; *FD*: Lurue, Nobanion; **DD**: Tournament Rules; **LD**: Knacks.

116: Leprechauns and Giant Eagles as PC Races; *EEE*; *FD*: Malyk; **AD&D**: Adv.—Runefire; *WO*.

117: **FR**: The Incantatrix; **LC**: Temple of Helm, Knights of the Griffon, More on Fame and Infamy; *FD*: Bright Nydra; *EEE*; *WO*.

118: Reprinted Article Feature; Artifacts; Chef Class; **LC**: Open Air Market; *EEE*; **RL**: 2nd Edition Preview; *FD*: Dendar and Kezef; *WO*.

119: Champions of the Faith, **LC**: Knights of the Dove, Druid Circle of Chauntea; *EEE*; First Air; **DL5A**: The Endless War; *FD*: Finder Wyvernspur; *WO*; *DC*.

120: Special Shadowrun Issue; **SR**: Preview, **Adv.**—The Florida Key; *FD*: Jergal; *EEE*; *WO*.

122: Welcome to the Network Issue; Staff Profiles; *EEE*; Introduction to Horror Roleplaying, *IC*.

123: *EEE*; **LC**: Adv.—A Wish for Temptation; Magical Rings; *IC*, Horror RPGs.

126: Live Action Roleplaying; *EEE*; Using Props; **LC**: Interactive Guidelines; *DC*; *WW*; *IC*; How to Write Tournament Characters.

127: *EEE*; **PAR**: Adv.—HOM Sector for the Hol-I-DAYs; Running a Gameday; **AD&D**: Adv.—The Saving Grace of Valrenwood; **PS**: Holiday in Sigil; *IC*.

129: *EEE*; **LC**: Temple of Llira, Knights of the Hawk; **LJ**: Jungle Tales, Society in Malatra, New Races; **DL5A**: Adv.—Trouble in Mind; Jungle Books; **SR**: Jungle Lore for 2059; *PtB*: St. Cuthbert.

131: 48 Pages! **LC**: The Pillars of the Realm; *EEE*; *WGP*; **MSHA**: Game Preview, **Adv.**—Summer Jobs, The Balanced Super Team; John Hinkle Spotlight; **SA**: Adv.—My Lord Tiger; *I101*.

134: Saul Resnikoff Interview; *I101*; Network Clubs; *EEE*; Politics in Roleplaying; **AD&D**: Adv.—Intrigue in Raam; **LV**: Marybelle; Voting Tips; **LC**: Latest Character Creation Rules.

135: David Papay Spotlight; *I101*; *EEE*; **LC**: Temple of Gond; **FR**: Wolflords of Malar; **SR**: Shamanic Weaknesses; Abyssal Artifacts; *NRG*.

136: Jeffrey West Spotlight; *I101*; *EEE*; **LC**: Temple of Selune; Scorched One (monster); **LC**: Rockroost Hunters & Gatherers, The House of Spice, Blind Dick, The Happy Hippocampus; **FR**: Adv.—Hunger in the Harbor; Heroic Battles.

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140: Ken Ritchart Spotlight; **LC**: Judge Guidelines, Ravens Deep; *EEE*; **FR**: City of Ooze; *I101*; *PtB*: Cyndor; Polyhedron Writers Guidelines.

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Acronym Decoder

Game systems, campaign settings, and RPGA® campaigns are listed in **boldface**. Regular columns are listed in *italics*.

AD&D: Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®; **AE**: Amazing Engine®; **AIJ**: Adventures of Indiana Jones; **AM**: Ars Magica; **AQ**: Al-Qadim®; **BR**: Birthright®; **BU**: Bughunters; **BH**: Boot Hill®; *CAB*: Cryptic Alliance of the Bi-Month (GW); **CH**: Champions; **CHI**: Chill; **CoC**: Call of Cthulhu; *DC*: Dispel Confusion (Rules); **DCO**: Dark Conspiracy; **DD**: Dragon Dice™; **DF**: Dragon Fist™; **DL**: Dragonlance®; **DL5A**: Dragonlance: Fifth Age®; **DP**: Dawn Patrol; **DS**: Dark Sun®; **ED**: Earthdawn; *EEE*: Elminster's Everwinking Eye; **EV**: Everway®; *FD*: Forgotten Deities (**FR**); **FitS**: Fight in the Skies; **FR**: Forgotten Realms®; **GB**: Gangbusters™; **GH**: Greyhawk®; **GW**: Gamma World®; *I101*: Internet 101; *IC*: Island Campaigns; *ItD*: Into the Dark (Movie Reviews); **LC**: Living City™; **LD**: Living Death; **LJ**: Living Jungle; **LV**: Living Verge™ (Alternity®); **MM**: Mertwig's Maze; **MSH**: Marvel Super Heroes; **MSHA**: Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game; **MY**: Mystara®; *NRG*: The New Rogues Gallery (NPCs); **OA**: Oriental Adventures; **PAR**: Paranoia; *PtB*: Powers that Be (**GH**); **PS**: Planescape®; **RL**: Ravenloft®; **SA**: SAGA®; *SB*: Spelling Bee (New Spells); **SF**: Star Frontiers®; **SJ**: Spelljammer®; **SR**: Shadowrun; **SW**: Star Wars; **SZ**: Shatterzone; **TO**: TORG; **ToL**: Threads of Legend (**ED**); **TS**: Top Secret®; **TS/SI**: Top Secret: SI™; *TLG*: The Living Galaxy; *VD*: Video Drone (Movie Reviews); **VS**: Virtual Seattle; *WG*: Weasel Games; *WGP*: With Great Power (MSH, MSHA); *WO*: A World of Your Own; *WW*: Wayward Wizards (**FR**)

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World's Best Comics and Games	Newport News	VA
Roanoke Hobbies	Roanoke	VA
The Dagger's Sheath	Virginia Beach	VA
Eagles Games, Models and Miniatures	Bellingham	WA
Discordia Games	Bremerton	WA
Cavern Games	Kennewick	WA
House of Heroes	Oshkosh	WI

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